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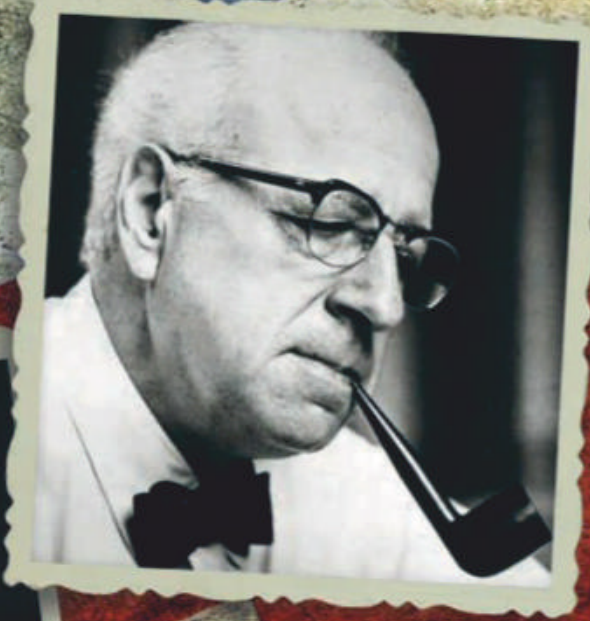
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SOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

Copland • Ravel • Stravinsky

'Symphonic Dances'

Copland Appalachian Spring – Suite

Ravel Daphnis et Chloé – Suite No 2

Stravinsky The Firebird – Suite (1919 version)

Park Avenue Chamber Symphony Orchestra / David Bernard

Recursive Classics © RC2061415 (64' • DDD)



You have to hand it to New York's Park Avenue Chamber Symphony and their intrepid leader David Bernard for sheer pluck and pure chutzpah, as they once again record repertoire warhorses that are more than sufficiently represented in the catalogue by world-class orchestras. As it happens, the three ubiquitous ballet suites featured on their latest release represent some of the organisation's best work.

In Stravinsky's *Firebird* Suite, one cannot help but be impressed by the rhythmic discipline and the colourful allure in the brass and woodwinds. The introduction is dark and lugubrious yet texturally clear, giving no indication that the Firebird is about to make a sparking and incisive entrance! If the finale's climax is underplayed, the small string section's intonation is more focused and secure compared to their relatively shaky work throughout an earlier Stravinsky/Bartók release (A/16). On the other hand, they cannot really project the sweep and sustaining power needed to fully do justice to the lyrical sections of the 'Pantomime' and the opening part of the 'Danse générale' from Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* Suite No 2.

Copland's *Appalachian Spring* Suite plays to the ensemble's strengths and limitations. The threadbare string sonorities cast a convincingly fragile and vulnerable light on the opening slow section's long note values, complemented by the fuller-throated flute and clarinets. The subsequent *Allegro* movement's jagged attacks and releases don't match the confident precision one expects, yet still manage to convey great style and

character. This applies as well to 'Solo Dance of the Bride'.

I can quibble about occasionally skewed balances (a prominent harp here, a backward violin pizzicato there), yet the sound generally reflects what one might hear from a choice concert-hall seat. On the whole, this disc amounts to the Park Avenue Chamber Symphony's finest release to date. **Jed Distler**

D'Haene

Music with Silent Aitakes

Reigakusha Gagaku Ensemble;

Ensemble Modern / Kasper De Roo

Ravello © RR8008 (42' • DDD)



Gagaku, the music of the Imperial Japanese Court, has exerted a fascination on

Western composers for many decades, not least Britten, Cowell, Messiaen and La Monte Young. Western audiences have been slower to warm to it but cultural gaps are a two-way phenomenon: I recall the fascinated befuddlement of Ono Gagaku Kai at the rapturous reception accorded them at the 1985 Proms.

The Belgian composer Frederic D'Haene (b1961) studied with (among others) Globokar, Pousseur and Rzewski (to whom he was assistant in the 1990s) and first encountered gagaku in 1986. D'Haene became intrigued with the idea of integrating elements from widely disparate types of music in a style he terms 'paradoxophony' and *Music with Silent Aitakes* (2003-06; the final word's apostrophisation on the cover is spurious) is a very fine example of this. It is scored for 14 gagaku players accompanied by a chamber orchestra of 13. An 'aitake' is the chord cluster produced by the Japanese reed instrument, the shô, of which there are three featured in the work, and silences form crucial structural markers in the two large, complex gagaku movements, 'Haya yo byoushi' and 'Haya roku byoushi'. These each run for a quarter of an hour and are framed and separated by three

much briefer 'Netori' sections, acting as prelude, interlude and postlude.

One of the compositional bases of D'Haene's score is an alternation of drones on E and B. These may be a perfect fifth apart but there is nothing remotely tonal in the music built over the top. D'Haene has constructed with estimable precision a work where both ensembles accompany and counterpoint each other, achieving a remarkably satisfying synthesis that transcends how dissonant or alien the musical language may seem. The performance, recorded in Frankfurt in 2015, sounds immaculate, as does Ravello's recording.

Guy Rickards

Krouse

Armenian Requiem, Op 66

Shoushik Barsoumian *sop* **Garineh Avakian** *mez*

Yeghishe Manucharyan *ten* **Vladimir Chernov** *bar*

Ruben Harutyunyan *duduk* **Jens Lindemann,**

Bobby Rodriguez *tpts* **Christoph Bull** *org*

VEM Quartet; Tziatzan Children's Choir;

Lark Master Singers; UCLA Philharmonia /

Neal Stulberg

Naxos American Classics © ② 8 559846/7

(95' • DDD)

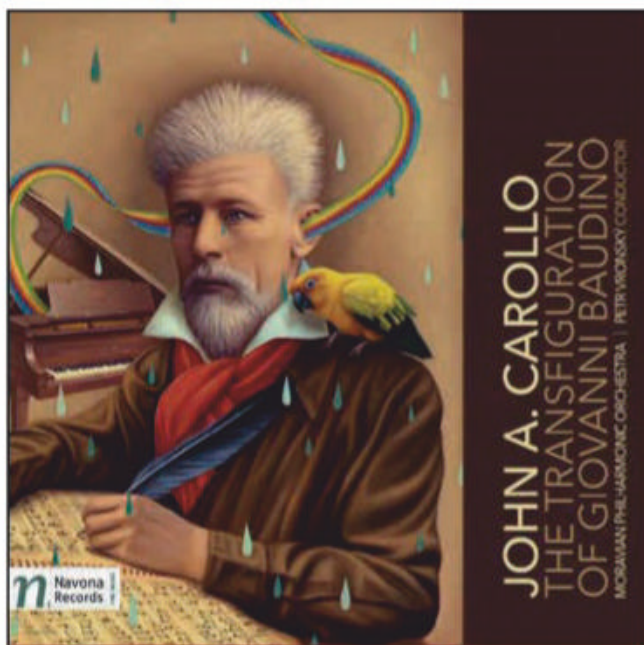
Texts and translations available from naxos.com



Ian Krouse's powerful *Armenian Requiem*, commissioned by Vatsche Barsoumian's

Lark Music Society, draws on traditional liturgical chant and poetry to make a powerful case for redemption through music. Climaxing unconventionally at the beginning of the second half and not the end, Krouse's sprawling tapestry of 21st-century colours, sonorities and textures, infused with his knowledge of Armenia's deep and rich musical history, is a timeless and timely pan-religious call to 'fight against oppression', as Barsoumian writes in his booklet note, 'not with arms and violence, but with immortal song'.

Part 1 begins with the formal strength of Creation followed by a bitter lullaby

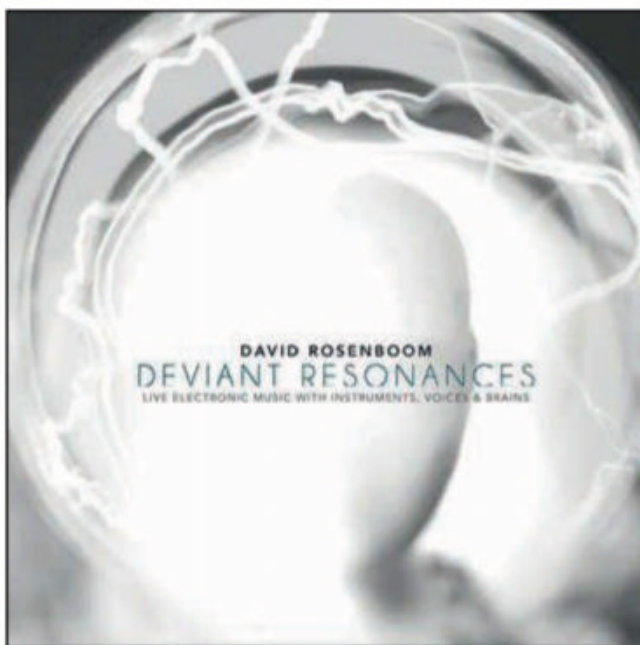


JOHN A. CAROLLO
THE TRANSFIGURATION
OF GIOVANNI BAUDINO
MORAVIAN PHE-HARMONIC ORCHESTRA | PETR VODSKÝ CONDUCTOR

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GIOVANNI BAUDINO**
JOHN A. CAROLLO

John A. Carollo's **THE TRANSFIGURATION OF GIOVANNI BAUDINO** is a fascinating mixture of music which conjures up diverse emotional responses. As Carollo writes, "I have always preferred to let music speak for itself. We each derive our own unique personal meanings from our listening experiences and most of it is felt viscerally." *NAVONA (NV6109)*

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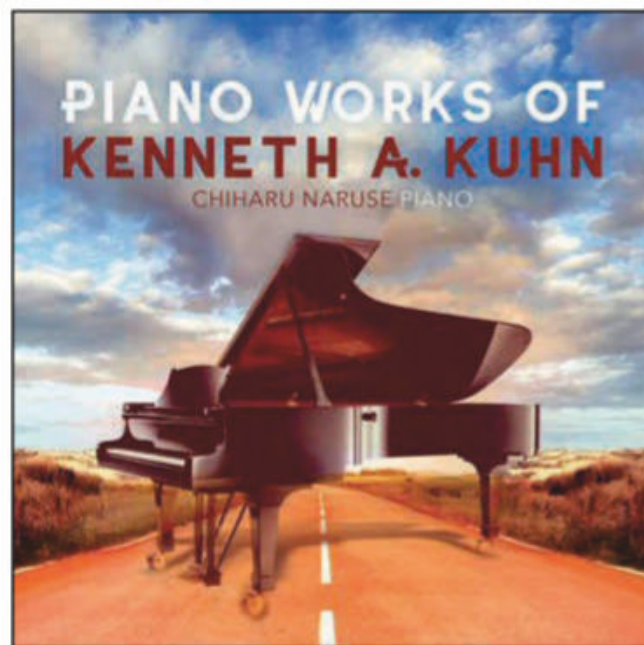


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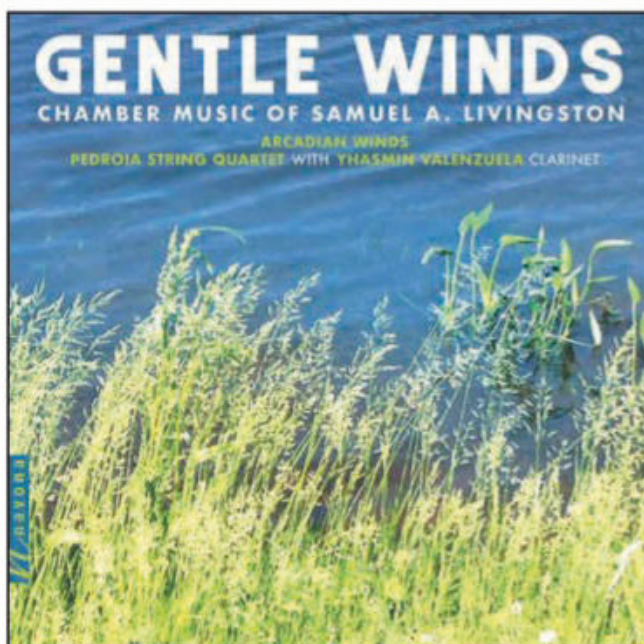


**PIANO WORKS OF
KENNETH A. KUHN**
CHIHARU NARUSE PIANO

**PIANO WORKS OF
KENNETH A. KUHN**

After finding the music he wanted to hear did not exist, composer and pianist **Kenneth A. Kuhn** sought to create that music himself. The result, **PIANO WORKS OF KENNETH A. KUHN**, is a cathartic journey through the memories and imagination of the composer. Kuhn's album leaves listeners enriched and enchanted.

BIG ROUND (BR8954)
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bigroundrecords.com/catalog/br8954



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SAMUEL A. LIVINGSTON

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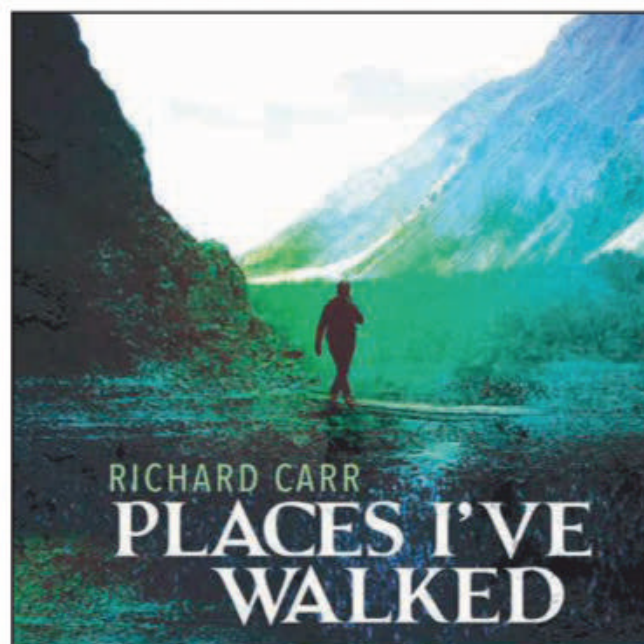


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WALKED**

PLACES I'VE WALKED
RICHARD CARR

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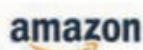
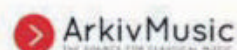
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Gil Rose and the Boston Modern Orchestra Project turn their attention to the music of David Sanford

sung with soaring range by Garineh Avian. A tremendous flood sequence – ‘Moon of the Armenian Tombs’ – in which the assembled forces come together for the first time to overwhelming effect, ends with thunderous timpani recalling the many five-star recordings made in Royce Hall by the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

Part 2 opens with an even more resplendent cry from the Book of Lamentations featuring thrilling chromatic writing for the chorus before ending in a radiant Amen illuminated by organist Christoph Bull. This great movement is followed by eight short tracks of a gentler, more conciliatory nature; the last, Krouse’s response to Daniel Varoujan’s ‘Blessing of the Land’, has a shining Mahleresque quality.

With the composer producing, conductor Neal Stulberg’s command of the assembled forces – including many of LA’s finest musicians, such as the UCLA Philharmonia’s concertmaster Movses Pogossian – brings with it the assurance

of authority. The full texts, which add substantially to the impact, are available on Naxos’s website. **Lawrence Vittes**

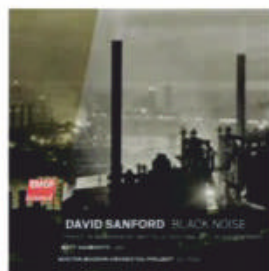
Sanford

Black Noise. Prayer: in memoriam Dr Martin Luther King, Jr^a. Scherzo grosso^b

^aSarah Brady fl^a Eric Berlin tpt^b Matt Haimovitz vc

Boston Modern Orchestra Project / Gil Rose

BMOP/sound ④ 1063 (48’ • DDD/DSD)

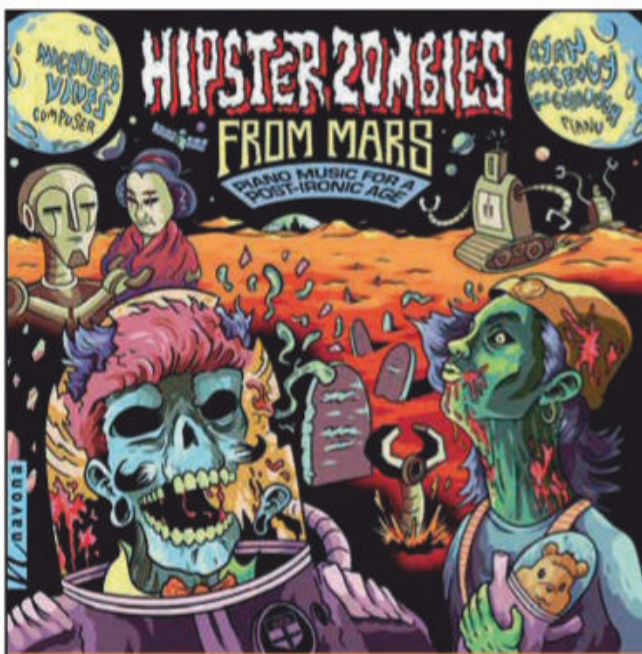


David Sanford (b1963) is an alumnus of the University of Northern Colorado, New England Conservatory and Princeton. He has received a string of awards and fellowships, most notably the Rome Prize and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and American Academy of Arts and Letters. His music, perhaps reflecting in part his African American roots, transcends

standard genre boundaries. I do not here mean ‘crossover’: it is far too uncompromising (and slyly humorous) for that label!

Sanford’s work with the Pittsburgh Collective, the 20-piece big band he founded in 2003, infuses all the works here with elements of jazz, Latin, funk and contemporary (but tonal) classical. One can hear this mix from the outset of the title-track, *Black Noise* (2017), a vibrant, 12-minute toccata inverting the notion of white noise (the name works on a number of levels, however). As exciting a listen as John Adams’s more celebrated *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*, it is, dare I say it, a rather more satisfying one.

That Sanford is a composer with something to say is evident from *Prayer: in memoriam Dr Martin Luther King, Jr* (1992), scored for solo winds, piano, percussion and solo strings (but with an electric bass replacing the acoustic instrument to give the

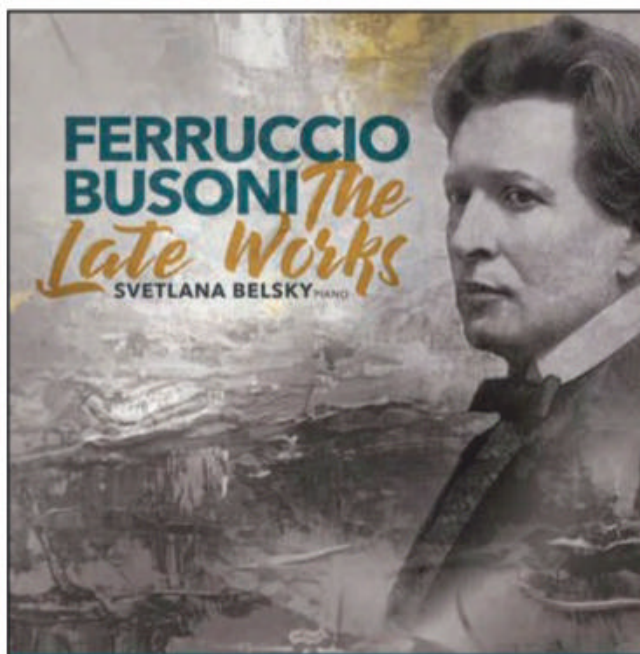


HIPSTER ZOMBIES FROM MARS NICHOLAS VINES

Nicholas Vines's **HIPSTER ZOMBIES FROM MARS** is a kaleidoscopic ride through years of compositional endeavors and piano practice. From outer space to the darkest recesses of the human mind, this Navona Records album alludes to worlds well beyond itself, sometimes seriously, sometimes satirically, sometimes both simultaneously. *NAVONA (NV6173)*

nicholasvines.com

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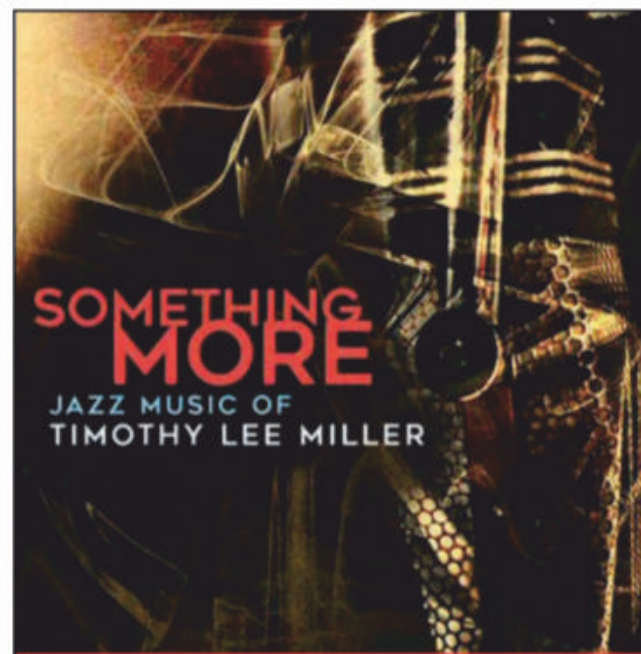


FERRUCCIO BUSONI: THE LATE WORKS SVETLANA BELSKY

Few people ever meet their true soulmates. How heartening, thus, to witness a spiritual kinship bridging more than a century; the one between 19th/20th-century scholar-composer Ferruccio Busoni and contemporary pianist **Svetlana Belsky**, impressively and vividly documented on Ravello Records' **FERRUCCIO BUSONI: THE LATE WORKS**. *RAVELLO (RR8007)*

svetlanabelsky.com

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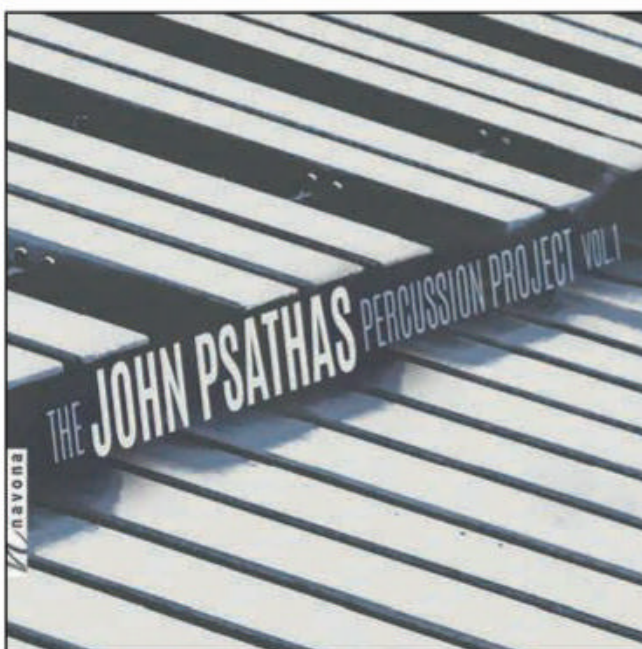
SOMETHING MORE TIMOTHY LEE MILLER

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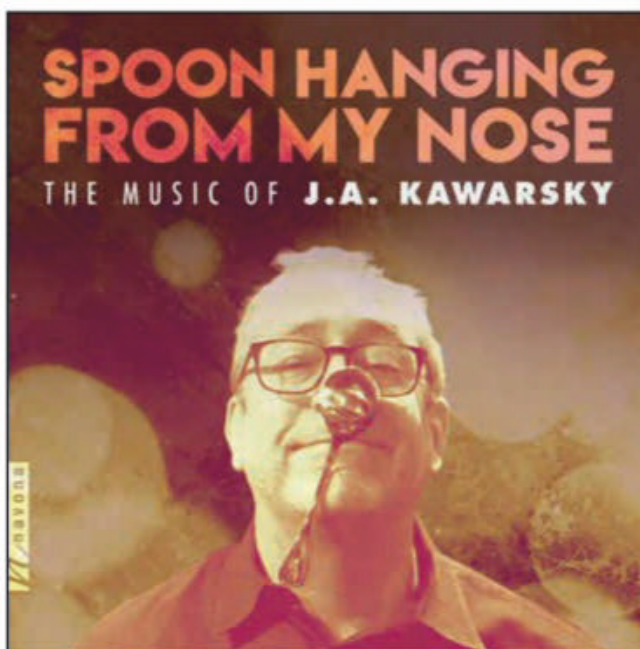


THE JOHN PSATHAS PERCUSSION PROJECT VOL. 1 OMAR CARMENATES

THE JOHN PSATHAS PERCUSSION PROJECT VOL. 1 is percussionist **Omar Carmenates's** recorded interpretation of the work of the Greek New Zealand composer **John Psathas**. This groove-filled Navona Records album is the result of an expansive, multi-year collaboration and friendship with a mission to reimagine works from **Psathas's** compositional oeuvre.

NAVONA (NV6204)

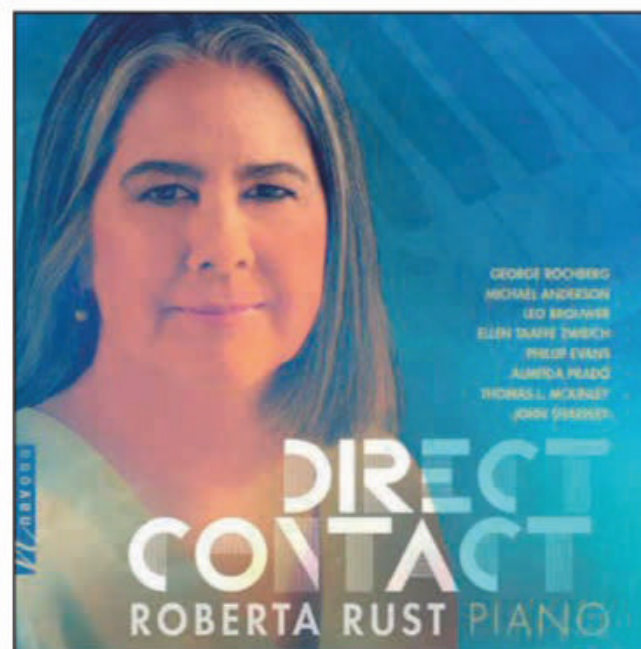
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SPOON HANGING FROM MY NOSE J.A. KAWARSKY

Navona Records proudly presents **Dr. J.A. Kawarsky's SPOON HANGING FROM MY NOSE**, the first full album of music by this prolific composer which tells stories, reimagines pieces of old, and offers compelling challenges. With this album, **Kawarsky** presents choral and orchestral works that are challenging, humorous, and altogether make a statement that cannot be ignored. *NAVONA (NV6194)*

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DIRECT CONTACT by renowned pianist **Roberta Rust** pays homage to eight composers whom she has had the opportunity to work directly with in some capacity during her impressive career. Bringing her own unique dynamism to these works, Rust demonstrates exactly why the *New York Times* hails her as "a powerhouse of a pianist." *NAVONA (NV6229)*

robertarust.com

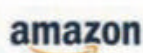
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sonority a harder edge). The flute and trumpet have prominent and atmospheric solo roles (not unlike the oboe and trumpet in Copland's *Quiet City*), idiomatically performed by Sarah Brady and Eric Berlin. Matt Haimovitz has rather more to do, and does it brilliantly, in *Scherzo grosso* (the title another of Sanford's sly puns), a four-movement cello concerto originally scored for cello and big band (2005) and reworked with orchestra – the version given here – the following year. As usual, the performances from BMOP throughout are splendid, captured in first-rate sound. Thoroughly recommended despite the ungenerous playing time.

Guy Rickards

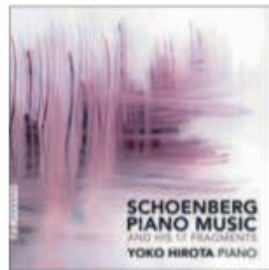
Schoenberg

Drei Klavierstücke, Op 11. Fünf Klavierstücke, Op 23. Klavierstück, Op 33. 17 Fragments

Yoko Hirota *pf*

Navona © NV6124 (54' • DDD)

From Phoenix PHX65122



Originally released on the Phoenix label in 2005, this all-Schoenberg disc gains a new lease of life courtesy of Navona. Sonically speaking, it still sounds glassy and ugly, marked by unusually close-up and dynamically constricted engineering that not even what appears to be a smidgen of artificial reverberation can remedy. Furthermore, the problem is compounded by Yoko Hirota's apparent allergy to legato and luminous sonorities. Note, for example, her persistently banged-out Waltz from the Five Pieces, Op 23, where the contrapuntal lines are doled out to one-dimensional effect, in

contrast with Maurizio Pollini's long-lined sense of the music's foreground and background layers (DG, 5/75). The opening piece of Op 11 lacks the graceful gravitas and requisite textural shimmer one hears from Paul Jacobs (Nonesuch) and Peter Serkin (Arcana), along with the magisterial mastery of Claudio Arrau's 1959 broadcast (BBC Legends, 3/05).

But if you want Op 11's thickly chordal finale to be brutally and unflinchingly precise, Hirota's your pianist. She also delivers similarly austere and concentrated readings of Schoenberg's 17 Fragments. Her approach works better for the atonal fragments than for the neo-Brahmsian ones. The individual pieces are not identified beyond their sequencing within each of their respective large groups, so you won't find the expected tempo and/or expressive indications. **Jed Distler**

Symphony Space, New York City

Our monthly guide to North American venues

Year opened 1978

Capacity Peter Jay Sharp Theater 760 seats,
Leonard Nimoy Thalia 160 seats, Bar Thalia 46 Seats

In 1978 the conductor Allan Miller and the late playwright/director Isaiah Sheffer rented the all-but-dormant Symphony Theater at the corner of 95th Street and Broadway to present a free 12-hour concert. The neighbourhood might have been sketchy but that didn't stop hundreds of people from queuing for Wall-to-Wall Bach. Soon after, the presenters leased the building to launch Symphony Space, a cultural venue that helped galvanize the area's rebirth.

Indeed, Wall-to-Wall continues to this day as a free, annual tradition, with each event embracing a different composer, genre or theme. Just as 1980 brought forth an all-day Aaron Copland 80th-birthday marathon, 2020 will mark Stephen Sondheim's 90th, with the composer present.

After selling its air rights in a controversial yet lucrative real estate deal, in 2001 Symphony Space underwent a major renovation, reopening the following year. They renovated the lobby and box office, and completely transformed the exterior with a wrap-around sign made up of interlocking planes, and blocks of glass, aluminum and cement plaster. In addition to preserving the 760-seat main theatre, Symphony Space integrated the long-closed Thalia movie theatre next door into its complex, transforming it into a flexible space conducive to solo recitals, chamber concerts, dance events and spoken-word presentations, plus state-of-the-art projections of high-definition theatre and opera broadcasts. Along with food and drink, the 46-seat Bar Thalia offers eclectic nightly entertainment including comedy, jazz and trivia games. Further infrastructure innovations include a new mobile first website and an improved customer/management system.



Although Sheffer stepped down as artistic director in 2010, two years before his death, the spirit of his vision still informs Symphony Space's programming philosophy, along with their generous policy in regard to visiting presenters and artists. In recent years, Symphony Space has instigated annual artist residencies, whose luminaries have included John Luther Adams, Béla Fleck and Rhiannon Giddens. 'We offer these artists the time, the space, the environment and the freedom to explore their thoughts, their passions, their creative impulses in ways that they might not be able to do elsewhere,' says Kathy Landau, Symphony Space's Executive Director. Such uniquely curated events are the essence of Symphony Space's programming, together with the intimacy of each of its venues that, according to Landau, 'allows us to shrink the distance between artist and audiences. In other words, Symphony Space is of New York, rather than in New York.'

Jed Distler

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MAfestival Early Music in Bruges

Ex machina

God, man & machine

www.mafestival.be

Fri 02 – Sun 11.08.19

Under the heading **Ex machina** MAfestival explores the intriguing bond between god, man and machine. By becoming smarter, healthier and older, with help of technology, we resemble the inaccessible gods we have always envied. According to Yuval Noah Harari, author of the recent bestseller *Homo Deus*, this optimism about progress is leading to the eradication of our own existence. Does the fall come after pride? MAfestival looks for the answers, guiding the audience through music about human gods and divine people, along the rise of musical machines and the downside of technology.

Visit Bruges and discover early music

Highlights

Fr 02.08.19 – 20h00
Concertgebouw Brugge

King Arthur
Purcell's theater magic
Vox Luminis / Lionel Meunier

Tu 06.08.19 – 20h00
St. Jacob's Church

Il castrato
Unearthly voices in baroque Italy
Tim Mead & Arcangelo

We 07.08.19 – 20h00
Chapel of Ter Potterie

Prometheus
Beethoven the Enlightened
Olga Paschchenko

Sa 10.08.19 – 20h00
Concertgebouw Brugge

Il Diluvio Universale
A Sicilian apocalypse
Cappella Mediterranea & Le Choeur de
Chambre de Namur / Leonardo García Alarcón



A LETTER FROM *Seattle*

Thomas May reports on the innovations that are keeping this West Coast city's music scene vibrant



Across the United States, the pressure is on to redefine longstanding classical music institutions that otherwise face potential extinction. The West Coast in general commands a reputation for spearheading this sort of innovation, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic in particular tends to be singled out as its epicentre. But LA has a contender of late over 1000 miles to the north, where the Seattle Symphony Orchestra (SSO) – with a fraction of the LA Phil's annual operating budget (just under \$30 million versus \$120 million) – has been similarly winning attention for its efforts to revamp the American orchestral profile.

In March the SSO launched a new venue at the corner of its home concert complex (Benaroya Hall) in downtown Seattle: Octave 9, which boasts state-of-the-art tech allowing for sophisticated visual as well as acoustical manipulation of the space. It has the potential to become something of a mini-IRCAM. In its first month alone, Octave 9 presented a 24-hour marathon featuring the work of more than 50 living composers back-to-back. There was also a thoughtful programme on connections between jazz and classical traditions in American music curated by SSO composer-in-residence Derek Bermel, who is using Octave 9's resources to implement various community engagement projects.

Though its size accommodates only solo or chamber performances, Octave 9 is intended to be an educational and experimental arm for what happens in the big concert hall – and an active workshop where visiting composers can work on ideas with orchestral musicians and introduce their art to audiences.

This is exactly what happened ahead of one of the season's most thrilling concerts to date. The German composer Heiner Goebbels, joined by a handful of SSO members and other local musicians, offered an engaging entrée into his aesthetic of theatricalised sonorities, including a chamber sketch of the SSO commission that received its premiere a few evenings later in late April. The latter involved a new movement for *Surrogate Cities*, Goebbels's symphonic magnum opus begun in the 1990s. With the stage crowded to the lip to fit the expanded ensemble and accompanied by a vivid lighting design, music director Ludovic Morlot led an exuberant, overpowering performance. It opened up fresh vistas for what a contemporary symphony can express.

The committed imagination with which Morlot and the players have introduced new music and less familiar repertoire was surely a factor in the public vote that secured the SSO its status this season as *Gramophone's* Orchestra of the Year. Other significant commissions premiered of late by the SSO have included a concerto by the virtuoso clarinetist-composer Kinan Azmeh for his instrument and Caroline Shaw's *Watermark*, in which the

young American's response to the Third Piano Concerto by Beethoven – both played with intensely alert poetry by soloist Jonathan Biss – intriguingly considers alternative paths to those Beethoven chose for his material.

A bittersweet tinge flavours all of these recent successes: Morlot is completing his tenure with the SSO, having made such an indelible mark on its programming and its playing alike. His successor, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra chief conductor Thomas Dausgaard, takes up the post this fall but is already greatly popular with the SSO and Seattle audiences. Dausgaard has been a regular presence for some time as SSO principal guest conductor and returned in April to lead the posthumous premiere of the late George Walker's moving *Sinfonia No 5 (Visions)*, a compact, uncompromising score written in the composer's 90s and incorporating his reactions to the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church massacre in 2015.

Major changes are afoot at Seattle Opera as well, which general director Aidan Lang is about to leave to helm Welsh National Opera. The company also opened a new headquarters this season,

which promises to allow for more engagement with the public. Taking Lang's place will be Christina Scheppelmann, who currently leads the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona.

It's naturally too early even to venture a guess as to her vision, but Scheppelmann will inherit a company that has seriously addressed itself to the issue of audience building – particularly through outreach to marginalised communities. Lang has more or less sidestepped Seattle Opera's reputation as a Wagner (or at least *Ring*) house. A number of courageous and risky choices (alongside warhorses) mark his tenure, such as a disturbingly effective mainstage production in the autumn of *The Turn of the Screw* that somehow conveyed the chamber intimacy of Britten's score.

Innovative thinking can also be found in Seattle's flourishing early music scene. In February Seattle Baroque partnered with the contemporary dance company Whim W'Him to present a stunningly choreographed version of Pergolesi's *Stabat mater*. Lutenist/director Stephen Stubbs's Pacific MusicWorks company has been presenting multimedia shows in its 'Underground' series in informal venues around the city.

The University of Washington's Meany Center for the Performing Arts serves as a venue not only for leading pianists and chamber musicians in traditional concerts but for such unusual events as the Jack Quartet's concerts exploring brain-body interactions. In May the Jacks concluded their three-year UW residency with a performance using feedback from specially designed 'brain helmets' and muscle neuron sensors to map out a new kind of synergetic music. **G**

Ludovic Morlot is completing his tenure of the SSO, having made such an indelible mark on its programming and its playing

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Pictured: Violinist Janine Jansen (DECCA / © Marco Borggreve) who featured on the January 2016 cover of Gramophone. Full annual retail price for print only (13 issues) is \$142.87; print only annual subscription or Digital Edition or Reviews Database (\$101); Digital Club (\$134); Gramophone Club (\$167). If choosing a print option, an addition overseas P+P charge will be added at \$35.75 (Outside EU). If you have a subscription enquiry then please email subscriptions@markallengroup.com

Why are so many great works so rarely heard?

It's always important to question consensus. It's not that there's nothing positive about everyone agreeing, but when they do, there's always the chance that an alternative view has got pushed out. It applies particularly to art. Cultural history is full of examples of music, architecture or paintings that were collectively ignored (even in some cases derided) only to be subsequently declared significant. Just think of Pre-Raphaelite art. Often that change comes about due to a plucky champion: Leonard Bernstein and the music of Mahler in the US comes to mind, or John Betjeman and Victorian architecture in the UK. That latter example is well worth pondering every time a piece of mid-20th-century modernism is condemned to the wrecking ball. Luckily such destructive decisions don't need to be made with eminently storable symphonic scores but it does remain a mystery why so many great mid-20th-century American orchestral works never entered the regular repertoire.

Take the surging themes in Howard Hanson's Third Symphony; or, in Paul Creston's Third, the sense of beguiling mystery that leads us through some beautifully written episodes as the composer depicts the life of Christ (a work only programmed live three times in more than half a century); or the grandly sweeping score of the Second Symphony of the prolific Alan Hovhaness which – when placed before members of some of America's greatest orchestras just a few years ago – proved a joyful new discovery.

The conductor who introduced those players to the work was Gerard Schwarz, and this month he aims to do the same for *Gramophone* readers too,



Martin

championing these and other symphonies which have largely remained unknown to modern ears. In doing so, he in fact follows in the footsteps of the likes of Koussevitzky, Ormandy and Stokowski, who either premiered or performed them. So why have they fared thus? The commercial requirements to fill halls (easier done with canonical works) undoubtedly plays a role. But the joy of recording is that it's never been easier to explore for yourself: I hope you enjoy the journey.

I was pleased that consensus wasn't always in evidence at this year's Classical:NEXT either. As the annual meeting of performers, programmers and innovators in the classical music world, if everybody had agreed then part of the conference's point – to discuss, challenge and share ideas – would be undermined. To give one example, in a debate about how orchestras should use online video, some were adamant high quality was key even at the expense of quantity, while others felt people wanted instant backstage access however lo-fi it might be. (Looking at our site, my take on this is that it's the strength of story that matters most of all.) Streaming continued to divide opinion of course – with labels still caught between the opportunities for audience growth and the commercial challenges posed because revenue is considerably lower than when selling a CD. There was, however, a shared consensus view on one thing: that music matters, and can enhance and transform lives. After three days of intense activity, hundreds of delegates returned to their various parts of the world newly strengthened with that inspirational belief and message.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'I've long questioned why certain American symphonies of the middle 20th century are rarely performed.'

GERARD SCHWARZ writes. 'I hope that by expressing my admiration for works by Hanson, Schuman, Creston, Diamond, Mennin, Hovhaness and Piston, readers will want to explore their output further.'



'A Collection on Brahms's meditations on last things was never going to be a bundle of laughs,' admits

RICHARD WIGMORE. 'But my repeated confrontation with music of such stark beauty and emotional truth, in performances by some of the world's finest singers, has been a moving and enriching experience.'



'It was fascinating to delve into the history of Handel's London and his two "rival queens",' says:

ALEXANDRA COGLAN, who interviews sopranos Lucy Crowe and Mary Bevan about their new recording. 'I was surprised to learn that Britain's tabloid press is far from a new phenomenon!'

THE REVIEWERS Andrew Achenbach • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Michelle Assay
Richard Bratby • Edward Breen • Liam Cagney • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer)
Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows
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Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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Kahchun Wong
Hannu Lintu
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Shiyeon Sung
Vladimir Ashkenazy
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Thomas Dausgaard
Robert Spano

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Gautier Capuçon
Lucas & Arthur Jussen
Akiko Suwanai
Leonidas Kavakos
Richard Tognetti
Tasmin Little
Joseph Calleja
Seong-Jin Cho
Martin Grubinger

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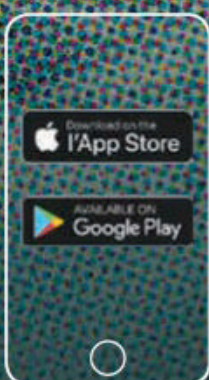
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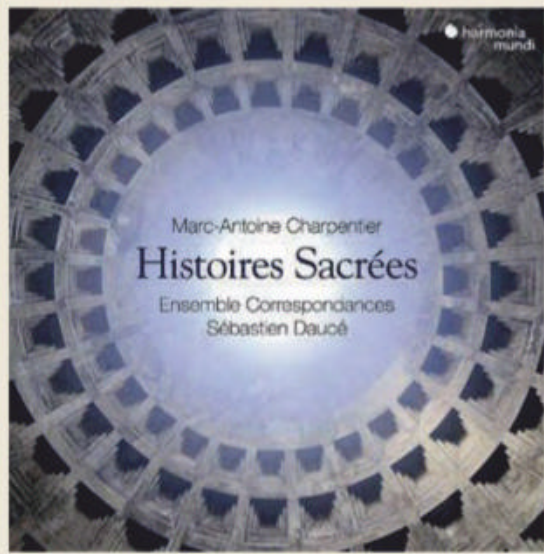


GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



CHARPENTIER
Histoires sacrées
Ensemble
Correspondances /
Sébastien Daucé
Harmonia Mundi
► **RICHARD
LAWRENCE'S
REVIEW IS ON
PAGE 34**

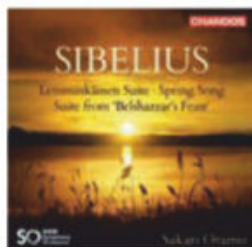
The ability of Sébastien Daucé and his Ensemble Correspondances to bring Baroque drama vividly to life is well proven: this selection of sacred works is compellingly performed and superbly recorded.



MOZART
Piano Concertos, Vol 4
Jean-Efflam Bavouzet *pf*
Manchester Camerata /
Gábor Takács-Nagy
Chandos

Bavouzet inspires, entertains and embodies the playfulness and grace of Mozart's much-loved works. A very fine recording.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 41**



SIBELIUS
Lemminkäinen Suite
BBC Symphony
Orchestra /
Sakari Oramo
Chandos

Sakari Oramo has a wonderful command of the majestic sweep and inner detail of Sibelius's music, this *Lemminkäinen* evocatively suggestive of mysterious legend.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 44**



SUK Asrael. Fairy Tale
Czech Philharmonic
Orchestra /
Jiří Bělohávek
Decca

A fitting final studio recording from Jiří Bělohávek – a powerful recording of this Czech masterpiece, with a deeply committed Czech Philharmonic giving their all.

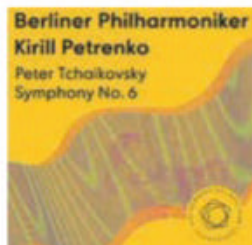
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 45**



TAVENER
The Protecting Veil
Sinfonietta Riga /
Matthew Barley *vc*
Signum

The opening poetry sets the tone – intimate, achingly personal – that pervades Matthew Barley's beautiful recording of one of the later 20th century's most beloved and moving works.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 46**



TCHAIKOVSKY
Symphony No 6,
'Pathétique'
Berlin Philharmonic
Orchestra /
Kirill Petrenko

Berliner Philharmoniker
A Pathétique as powerful as (though very different to) Currentzis's from a year ago, full of richly crafted orchestral colour.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 47**



MOZART
Piano Sonatas
Lars Vogt *pf*
Ondine

Perfectly controlled drama is paired with moments of deeply moving fragility by the pianist Lars Vogt throughout this beautifully played selection of spirited sonatas by Mozart.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 68**



BUXTEHUDE
Membra Jesu nostri
Ricercar Consort /
Philippe Pierlot
Mirare

Voices of rich brilliance and moving personality, captured perfectly in a vivid recording: a poignant performance of Buxtehude's reflections on the body of Christ.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 76**



'LOCUS ISTE'
The Choir of St John's
College, Cambridge /
Andrew Nethsingha
Signum

The contribution of St John's to choral music is immense, and on this joint celebration (150 years of the chapel and their 100th recording) they are in superb form under Andrew Nethsingha.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 84**



WAGNER
Siegfried
Sols; Hallé Orchestra /
Sir Mark Elder
Hallé

The focused drama of this *Siegfried*, concluding Mark Elder's Hallé *Ring*, makes for a gripping listening experience, the cast collectively bringing strong characterisation to their roles.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 94**



DVD/BLU-RAY
VACCAJ Giulietta e Romeo
Sols; Orch of La Scala, Milan / Sesto Quatrini
Dynamic

A discovery for many, I'd imagine – the little-known opera revealed, says critic Hugo Shirley, to be 'an excellent, highly effective piece'.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 93**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE
WILHELM BACKHAUS
SWR Classic
Big-hearted, powerful, grand performances of Beethoven and Brahms from a past master of the piano.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 102**

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FOR THE RECORD

Santtu-Matias Rouvali takes Philharmonia top job

The Philharmonia Orchestra has named Santtu-Matias Rouvali, the 33-year-old Finnish Chief Conductor of the Gothenburg Symphony and Tampere Philharmonic orchestras, as its next Principal Conductor. Simultaneously, the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra has announced that Rouvali will extend his initial four-year contract for another four years taking him to 2025 at the helm of Sweden's National Orchestra.

Rouvali – already the orchestra's Principal Guest Conductor – succeeds Esa-Pekka Salonen at the start of the 2021-22 season, becoming the second youngest conductor to hold a principal conductor post with a major London orchestra (Riccardo Muti was 32 when he was appointed to the top job by the Philharmonia in 1973). Salonen will assume the title of Conductor Emeritus.

'I am honoured to be the new Principal Conductor of the Philharmonia,' Rouvali said. 'This is the start of a great adventure: London is such an exciting place for orchestras, and the Philharmonia is at the heart of classical music life in this



The rise of Santtu-Matias Rouvali

city. The players of the Philharmonia can do anything: they are enormously talented and show an incredible hunger to create great performances. There is huge possibility with this orchestra, and we will do great things together.'

Rouvali, whose recent Alpha recording of Sibelius's First Symphony with the Gothenburg SO was awarded an Editor's Choice in our March issue, has drawn enthusiastic reviews from the London critics for his Philharmonia appearances. Of the Sibelius album, Edward Seckerson wrote that 'Everything about this performance is clearly, startlingly defined.

A penetrating ear is held to the score so that things like the approach to the development climax with woodwinds eerily swirling across each page are thrown into such sharp relief as to uncover strange and exciting dimensions to the harmony. Rarely were the bass lines so dramatically delineated.'

Rouvali's five-year contract with the Philharmonia will see him working with the orchestra for 10 weeks a year, both at the Southbank Centre and in the ensemble's various UK residencies.

Former King's Singer takes over in Phoenix

Christopher Gabbitas, a former member of the renowned vocal group The King's Singers, has been appointed Artistic Director of The Phoenix Chorale.

He was chosen following a two-year search process by the American choir as it looked for a replacement for Charles Bruffy, who had held the post from 1999 until 2017.

During his 15 years with The King's Singers, Gabbitas appeared on more than 30 albums and performed in almost 2000 concerts. He'd joined the group having been a choral scholar at St John's College, Cambridge, subsequently singing with groups including Polyphony, The King's Consort and the choir of the Temple Church while working as a lawyer. Reflecting on his appointment, and his experience of English and American choral traditions, Gabbitas said: 'During my time with The King's Singers I learned a great deal about the differing sounds of the English and American choral traditions, having grown up believing them to be identical! Each has incredible strengths: the English tradition possesses warmth and honesty; the American tradition a clarity and finesse that can be breathtaking.

'I'm excited to be able to bring these two great traditions together as I lead The Phoenix Chorale.'

Canadian pianist wins in China



The inaugural China International Music Competition has been won by Tony Siqi Yun, an 18-year-old Canadian.

As well as First Prize – worth \$150,000 – he also gains representation by Opus 3 in the US and Europe, and Armstrong Music and Arts in China. The win followed a performance with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Yannick Nézet-

Séguin of Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto. Second Prize (\$75,000) went to the 17-year-old Russian Alexander Malofeev (who, incidentally, is among the 25 pianists shortlisted for the Tchaikovsky Competition this month) while Third Prize (\$30,000) went to the 24-year-old American MacKenzie Melemed.

The China International Music Competition will be held every year and next year's competition will be dedicated to the violin.

BBC New Gen class of 2019 named

The BBC New Generation Artists Scheme has long been a reference point as to who are some of the finest young artists today, its alumni over two decades having gone on to garner acclaim, awards and to play a key role in shaping musical life. More than that of course, the scheme offers its members – who are on the scheme for two years – invaluable experience in broadcasting, recording and collaboration.

The BBC has now named its 2019 intake, and they are: pianists Eric Lu and Alexander Gadjiev, viola player Timothy Ridout, mezzo-soprano Ema Nikolovska, violinist Johan Dalene, the Consone Quartet and jazz guitarist Rob Luft.

Some names may already be familiar to *Gramophone* readers, not least Eric Lu, who won First Prize at the Leeds International Piano Competition in September, before releasing his debut album on Warner Classics as part of the competition's prize, and Johan Dalene, who triumphed at this year's Carl Nielsen Competition.

Hannu Lintu stays on in Helsinki

Finnish conductor Hannu Lintu will be staying in Helsinki when he steps down as Chief Conductor of the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra in 2021: right at the start of the following year he will take over as Chief Conductor of the Finnish National Opera and Ballet.

Lintu's collaborations with the company have already included Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (2016), Sibelius's *Kullervo* (2017) and Berg's *Wozzeck* (2019), with Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* to follow next year. According to a statement by his agents, the move reflects the conductor's shifting focus towards opera. As Lintu himself put it: 'it's so exciting for me to be able to focus on one of the greatest and most challenging artistic achievements: the symbiosis of music, words and the stage.' The four-and-a-half-year tenure will also embrace ballet.

The FNOB praised Lintu's 'ability to control the large-scale productions of opera, as well as excel in visionary interpretation,' adding that 'having Lintu, a high-profile artist in the Finnish music scene, as an advocate, supporter and



Lintu to lead the Finnish National Opera and Ballet

advisor will be an important asset for the Finnish National Opera and Ballet.'

It's something listeners to recordings will well be able to concur with. Recent album acclaim includes last year's Concerto Award-winning recording with Christian Tetzlaff of Bartók's Violin Concertos Nos 1 and 2, and from the previous year, what our critic described as 'one of the finest performances on record' of Sibelius's *Tapiola*, both albums available on Ondine.

ONE TO WATCH

Konstantin Krimmel Baritone

Alpha is a label whose approach to A&R is always worth paying attention to, whether it be innovative programmes from established artists like Patricia Kopatchinskaja or Barbara Hannigan, or new discoveries. So it's with some anticipation that we await the debut from one of their newest signings, due out in September. Even just a short encounter with German-Romanian baritone Konstantin Krimmel on one of the many videos on his website leaves an impression of an intense singer with a dramatic stage presence.

And drama certainly lies at the heart of his Alpha debut: Krimmel wanted to 'tell a story' for his first album, so has woven together a selection of ballads, 'genuine operas in just a few minutes', whose texts – by writers including Schiller, Goethe and Heinrich Heine – draw on myths and legends, and are here set by Schubert, Schumann, Adolf Jensen and Carl Loewe. The album is recorded with Krimmel's longstanding musical partner, pianist Doriana Tchakarova.

Such high-drama song seems a fitting programme for a first foray into the studio for someone whose CV boasts first prizes



from a number of competitions including the Deutscher Musikwettbewerb (where he also took the audience prize), the Helmut Deutsch Song Competition and the Haydn Competition for Classical Song and Aria (Rohrau). But just to prove it's not all dark and brooding Romanticism, his next project for Alpha will be as a soloist in Handel's *Brockes Passion* with Jonathan Cohen and Arcangelo, due in the studio in October.

GRAMOPHONE *Online*

The magazine is just the beginning. Visit gramophone.co.uk for ...

Podcasts

Gramophone's current Young Artist of the Year is Lise Davidsen, a singer with a huge future ahead of her. James Jolly went to see her at her home in Copenhagen and took the opportunity to talk to her about her new album for Decca, featuring music by Richard Strauss and Wagner.

Michael Fabiano, recently in London to sing the title-role in Gounod's *Faust* at the Royal



Lise Davidsen appears on the Gramophone Podcast

Opera House, Covent Garden, has recorded an album of arias by Donizetti and Verdi. James Jolly caught up with him during rehearsals at Covent Garden to talk about the programme of the recital, and his interest in the operatic music of this period.

Orchestra of the Year playlists

We've created playlists on Apple Music dedicated to each orchestra nominated for the 2019 Orchestra of the Year Award, you can listen to them all at gramophone.co.uk/ AppleMusic, and then vote for your favourite!

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Duo Tsuyuki & Rosenboom marks its 10th anniversary as a partnership with *Variations²*, sets of variations for two pianos by Brahms, Saint-Saëns and Lutosławski.



The composers featured on this release were inspired by the music of others when writing these sets of variations. Brahms paid a very personal tribute to his late friend, Robert Schumann, when he chose Schumann's final work, the 'Ghost Variations', as the basis for his own *Variations*, Op. 23. We also hear Brahms' magnificent 'St Anthony' Variations inspired by Haydn, Saint-Saëns' *Beethoven Variations*, his most substantial work for two pianos, Reinecke's more intimate *Bach Variations*, and Lutosławski's *Variations on a Theme by Paganini* based on the same Paganini *Caprice* that inspired Rachmaninoff's famous *Rhapsody*.

Piano duo Erica Paganelli and Daniela Filosa worked closely with the acclaimed composer Hugues Dufourt to interpret his music for this album, which was recorded in Dufourt's presence and includes the world-premiere recording of his *L'Éclair d'après Rimbaud* and *La Fontaine de Cuivre d'après Chardin*.



Dufourt's electrifying *L'Éclair d'après Rimbaud* for two pianos and two percussionists, is based on Rimbaud's *Une Saison en Enfer* (*A Season in Hell*) which in turn was inspired by his tumultuous relationship with Verlaine. We also hear Dufourt's solo piano work, *Vent d'Automne*, as well as *La Fontaine*, which references Chardin's painting *La fontaine de cuivre*, hanging in the Louvre. Paris is at the heart of this album, unifying Dufourt's music with that of Ravel and Couperin. Paganelli and Filosa perform Ravel's stunning *Sites auriculaires* and the *Introduction et Allegro* arranged for two pianos, presenting a fascinating contrast with the French Baroque miniatures of Couperin.



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ARTISTS & *their* INSTRUMENTS

Christophe Rousset on his anonymous late 16th-century Italian harpsichord



“I first encountered this instrument at an auction in Paris in around 1996. I'd been told about the sale and so I went and saw the instrument in the exhibition beforehand. A friend who was a harpsichord-maker was with me and he said, 'You really should buy this'. So I went to the auction – it was the first time I'd ever been to one, I was trembling! – and in the end I got it.

It's an anonymous late-16th-century Italian harpsichord that was reconfigured by Rinaldo de Bertonis in Bologna in 1736 to extend its range up to high F and down to low C. The decoration was possibly added then, too. All the scenes painted on the external case are

furniture. But then it was taken away to be restored by David Ley – a process which took about seven years. David brought the instrument back to its intended design of four octaves, C to C – the same range that Frescobaldi would have had available to him.

Frescobaldi is a hugely important harpsichord composer. As a teacher, I always ask my students to study his *Toccate e partite d'intavolatura di cimbalo* because they are so technically challenging. I have to confess that I myself studied them on a copy of the French double harpsichord, but when you play this music on a turn-of-the-century Italian instrument like this one, it suddenly all

about music – you have Orfeo surrounded by animals, the fight between Apollo and Marsyas, there are dance scenes, concerts with musicians ... It's absolutely splendid to look at, even if the boxwood keys are unusually worn.

For about five years it was just a nice piece of

becomes clearer somehow. It's like reading Shakespeare in French – most of it is there, but you don't have that Shakespearean authenticity. Playing Frescobaldi on this instrument, I find that the sound leads me in the right direction.

You can't change registers so you have to play the whole repertoire in one colour – and finding different colours within one colour is not that easy! In addition, the resonance is less compared to a French harpsichord because the strings are shorter – the instrument is tiny, actually. But somehow the attack is much harder, and the articulation possibilities are much stronger. You can play very energetically – much more so than on a French harpsichord. And I would say that the tone is rounder somehow – it has more personality.

The harpsichord lives in my home, and my biggest pleasure is to offer it to my students to play when they come to have lessons. It's good for me to hear it from that perspective; the sound doesn't come to you in the same way when you're playing it yourself. I still find it touching to see how worn the keys are. To see how much it has been played in the past gives it spirit – I like being able to put my feet into the footsteps of someone else.”

Christophe Rousset's Frescobaldi recording on Aparté is reviewed on page 66

Leading barrister records Alkan



A barrister who specialises in commercial disputes and international investment arbitration has recorded two of Alkan's most daunting piano works, the Symphony for solo piano and Concerto for solo piano, both from the *12 Études in all the minor keys*, Op 39. Paul Wee, who was born in Australia to Singaporean and Malaysian parents,

began learning the piano at the age of four, and later studied with Nina Svetlanova at the Manhattan School of Music, before returning to the United Kingdom to pursue a career in law. In 2016 he performed the Concerto for solo piano at a recital for the Alkan Society at St Mary's Church in London, which alerted the critic Bryce Morrison to his talent. Enlisting the help of Mike Spring, owner of APR and a fellow connoisseur of the piano, the producer Jeremy Hayes and engineer David Hinitt were assembled to make the recording, and this will be the first time that these monumental works have been coupled together. Robert von Bahr of BIS heard the finished master, and was bowled over by the quality of the playing. BIS will issue the disc later this year.

Karajan celebrated on Medici

We've chosen to highlight a celebration of Herbert von Karajan's legacy in our selection of videos to explore on medici.tv this month. The series, entitled 'The Boss', features many of the works for which the conductor was justly celebrated, including the Beethoven and Bruckner symphonies, the Verdi Requiem, and Richard Strauss's tone-poems. A work Karajan never conducted is Mahler's Third Symphony – you can catch Lahav Shani and the Rotterdam Philharmonic in the work, a concert recorded this May. Another young artist, the French pianist Lucas Debargue gave a concert in Moscow in May playing Scarlatti, Medtner and Liszt. With voting for the *Gramophone* Awards under way, why not watch our Opera winner from 2017, Berg's *Wozzeck*, filmed in Zurich with Christian Gerhaher in the title-role? And from the archive, we've a 1966 Brahms Violin Concerto with David Oistrakh and Gennady Rozhdestvensky conducting the Moscow Philharmonic. Visit medici.tv and search for 'Gramophone Selects'.



NEW RELEASES



**Zemlinsky, Rachmaninov, Arensky – Piano Trios
Smetana Trio**

Jitka Čechová *piano*, Radim Kresta *violin*,
Jan Páleníček *cello*



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chamber gems, as
performed by the
Smetana Trio

*BBC Music Magazine
Chamber Choice

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**Mussorgsky, Tchaikovsky, Glinka
Russian Romances**

Jozes Benci *bass*, Jana Nagy-Juhász *piano*



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Russian romances
encompassed in
Jozes Benci's voice

SU 4262-2

**Karel Kovařovic – The Complete String Quartets
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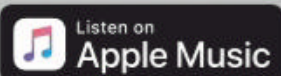


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GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO ... *Singspiel*

Richard Wigmore introduces an enduring and vividly communicative dramatic form

While 18th-century aristocrats gazed smugly at their reflected selves in heroic *opere serie*, ordinary folk enjoyed the earthier pleasures of the Singspiel, literally 'sung play'. Although the term had long existed to denote a play with music, it acquired its now-familiar meaning – German comic opera with spoken dialogue – only around 1750. It was the Leipzig composer Johann Adam Hiller (1728-1804) who did more than anyone to popularise the Singspiel. His rustic comedy *Die Jagd* ('The Hunt') is typical in its naive directness, with short songs and duets influenced both by German folk song and French *opéra comique*.

From the 1770s Viennese of all classes enjoyed the cheerful, homely works of Ignaz Umlauf, sometimes leavened with spectacular scenic effects. A case in point is the collapsing mine in *Die Bergknappen* ('The Miners'), which opened Emperor Joseph II's German National Singspiel in 1778. On a higher artistic level are the Singspiele of Carl Dittersdorf, whose deft, tuneful *Doktor und Apotheker* (1786) still gets an occasional airing. Typically, Mozart bent the humble genre to his own creative will, in the process creating its two indisputable masterpieces, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* and *Die Zauberflöte*.

The harem Singspiel *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* was Mozart's greatest hit in his lifetime. If a royalty system had existed, it would have made him a millionaire. Time and again *Die Entführung* transcends a genre that traditionally gave speech



The Queen of the Night in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* in Simon Quaglio's 1818 sets

and song equal weight. The influence of both Italian *opera seria* and *opera buffa* is omnipresent, whether in the vast arias for the heroine Konstanze, the quartet that closes Act 2 or the tragic recitative and duet for the condemned lovers.

Even more than *Die Entführung*, *Die Zauberflöte* takes the Singspiel into unprecedentedly lofty territory without losing sight of its demotic roots, exemplified by the exotic, fairy-tale setting and the character of Papageno, modelled on the Hanswurst figure of Viennese pantomime.

By the early 19th century the Singspiel's heyday was over. Elements survive in Beethoven's *Fidelio* and Weber's *Der Freischütz*, both of which begin as domestic comedies. Weber's one-act *Abu Hassan*, drawn from the *Arabian Nights*, is a late example, as are the Singspiele of Schubert, whose delightful *Die Verschworenen* ('The Conspirators') relocates Aristophanes's *Lysistrata* to medieval Vienna. Later composers preferred the term 'komische Oper' for their sentimental comedies with dialogue. The true successors of Singspiel were the operettas of Johann Strauss II, written in emulation of Offenbach, and, more distantly, the musicals of Jerome Kern and Richard Rodgers. **G**

► Listen to our Singspiel playlist on Qobuz

IN THE STUDIO

● **Rodger Podger**, *Gramophone's* current Artist of the Year, has started to record the Beethoven sonatas for piano and violin with the pianist **Christopher Glynn**. Vol 1 will contain Nos 1, 5 (*Spring*) and 7. The Channel Classics sessions took place at St John the Evangelist, Upper Norwood and the release is scheduled for next spring.

● Pianist **Ingrid Fliter** joined the Orchestra of the Americas and conductor **Carlos Miguel Prieto** for a Manuel de Falla album for Linn. *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* will be coupled with the *Three-cornered Hat* suite. Due for release this month.

● **François Leleux**, oboist and sometime conductor, directed the Scottish Chamber Orchestra in a Linn recording of French orchestral works. Alongside Bizet's sparkling Symphony in C, the album also includes suites by Bizet and Gounod.

● **Odaline de la Martinez** has recorded Dame Ethyl Smyth's 1923 opera *Fête galante* with the forces of Retrospect Opera. The work, featuring *commedia dell'arte* characters, is described as a 'dance dream'. The work, due out in September, will be the third Smyth opera de la Martinez has revived and recorded.

● **Riccardo Chailly** – with his super-orchestra, the Lucerne Festival Orchestra – has recorded the music of Richard Strauss for the first time. The album contains *Don Juan*, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, *Till Eulenspiegel* and the 'Dance of the Seven Veils' from *Salome* (incidentally the first Strauss opera Chailly will conduct in a staged production – early next year at La Scala, Milan with the much-admired Salome of Malin Byström).

● **David Bates's** period group **La Nuova Musica** have been into the studio with a stellar cast of soloists – including Iestyn Davies, Sophie Bevan and Rebecca Bottone – to record Gluck's *Orfeo e Euridice*. The resulting two-disc set will be issued in October by Pentatone.

● Having already conducted Beethoven's piano concertos from the keyboard with the **Royal Northern Sinfonia**, pianist **Lars Vogt** has moved on to Brahms's First Piano Concerto, once again directing from the keyboard. Although Boris Berezovsky has done the same, on a live recording for Mirare, it remains highly unusual for a work with such a monumental piano part and so symphonic an orchestral part. But Vogt knows his Royal Northern Sinfonia players well, having been their Music Director since 2015. Expect the disc in November on Ondine.

ORCHESTRA *Insight ...*

NHK Symphony Orchestra, Tokyo

Our monthly series telling the story behind an orchestra

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Home NHK Hall, Tokyo

Music Director Paavo Järvi (since 2016)

Founding Music Director Hidemaro Konoye

We regard it as one of the oldest radio orchestras in existence, but the NHK Symphony Orchestra was nothing of the sort until it was taken over by Japan's state broadcaster Nippon Hoso Kyokai at the age of 25. The composer-conductor Hidemaro Konoye founded the ensemble in 1926 as the New Symphony Orchestra (later the Japan Symphony), but with NHK's weight behind it from 1951, the rebranded NHKSO set its sights on becoming the finest large orchestra in Japan with the Pole Joseph Rosenstock charged with making it happen.

The NHKSO can boast a far more prestigious lineage than any of its fine Japanese counterparts and has always had a taste for the European. Karajan, Ansermet, Keiberth and von Matačić all worked with the orchestra in the middle of the last century and this is an organisation for whom relationships, once formed, are not forgotten: Herbert Blomstedt has been Honorary Conductor since 1986 and Wolfgang Sawallisch was for almost four decades. Ashkenazy, Dutoit, Previn, Suitner and Stein all had titles bestowed upon them and Tadaaki Otaka still holds one.

Sonically, the orchestra stands out for its precision and an elegant, even temper. In 1999, *Gramophone* referred to 'a group of players with remarkable discipline and technique' on hearing Prokofiev under Dutoit on Decca. Two decades later, the orchestra's Strauss under current chief Paavo Järvi was noted by Hugo Shirley for its 'clarity, control and impeccable orchestral discipline'. Hearing those qualities on display at the cavernous NHK Hall in Tokyo, it's not difficult to presume they bear some relationship to the focus and silence of the orchestra's audience (not far off 4000 when the hall is full).



An increasing flow of recordings new and old suggests the NHKSO's oft-discussed discipline delivers more incisiveness and subtlety than tedium. King International has issued us a wealth of archive material recently, with live performances stretching back decades under Wand, Neumann, Ashkenazy, Blomstedt, Martinon, Stein, Sawallisch and many more. A Rimsky-Korsakov *Scheherazade* under Horst Stein was described by Rob Cowan as 'beguilingly light-textured... vital but never brash'.

Paavo Järvi, Music Director since 2016, has increased the international profile of an ensemble that, for many years, didn't see the need to travel or be talked about outside Japan (its human make-up is, fascinatingly, untouched by globalization). The orchestra's piercing account of Mahler's Sixth Symphony was toured throughout Europe in 2017 and a new recording of the work will be issued in 2020, just in time for the orchestra to visit Europe once more.

Andrew Mellor

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BMOP on the airwaves

Back in November 2016 we profiled the Boston Modern Orchestra Project as they released their 50th recording on their own label: now there's a wonderful way to get to grips with that ever-growing catalogue of some of the most fascinating contemporary classical music, as they've launched BMOP Radio. 'BMOP Radio seeks to expand the new music audience, increase awareness of BMOP/sound's recordings, and make 20th- and 21st-century compositions easily accessible to the widest possible audience,' says Gil Rose, BMOP's founder and director (pictured). It's free, and available around the clock at BMOP.org/radio



BBC Phil's new notes service

The BBC Philharmonic has launched a new service to tech-savvy concert goers from next season: at every performance at its

Bridgewater Hall home, the Notes app will deliver live insights into the music being played. 'It's a vital step in our mission to cater to all music lovers, so we are keeping new audiences in mind as well as the experienced concert goer,' said Simon Webb, Director of the Manchester-based orchestra. In consideration of other audience members, anyone wishing to use the app will be seated in their own area of the hall.

German post for Jonathon Heyward

British conductor Jonathon Heyward has been announced as Chief Conductor of Nordwestdeutsche Philharmonie starting at the beginning of 2021. He'll be aged 28 then - exactly the same age as Andris Nelsons was when he began his spell in charge of the ensemble, prior to his move to the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in 2008. Heyward's CV includes winning first prize at the Besançon International Competition in 2015, spending three years as the Hallé's Assistant Conductor, and receiving a Dudamel Conducting Fellowship.

FROM WHERE I SIT


Renée Fleming is preparing once more to move into new musical territory, writes Edward Seckerson



A number of years ago, during the run of my erstwhile BBC Radio 3 show *Stage and Screen*, I took to the stage of the Royal Opera's Linbury Theatre with the soprano Renée Fleming for an in-depth conversation about her ever broadening and ever more spectacular career (at that point there was no indication that an asteroid would one day bear her name as it does now). But before we arrived on stage I played her rather startling version of Joni Mitchell's 'River'. There must have been a few in the audience that night who will have wondered if they were at the right event on the right day, such was the vocal transformation – and indeed even the astute vocal coach Mary King was momentarily taken in and taken aback.

Since then, in tandem with her opera and concertising, Fleming has embraced a number of different vocal styles through her love for and fascination with jazz, indie pop, and Broadway – and, as part of her consulting role with Chicago Lyric Opera, has launched Chicago Voices in celebration of that diversity. And that's not all. Between a wide-ranging Broadway album and her current disc of Brahms, Schumann and Mahler song she's actually trodden the boards of the Broadway stage as Nettie Fowler in a much-praised revival of Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel*. This month she is back in London playing Margaret Johnson in Adam Guettel (Richard Rodgers' grandson) and Craig Lucas's extraordinary *The Light in the Piazza* – it runs until July 5 – and during a break in rehearsal for 'official business' we found some down time to talk further about voices and their relationship to the rich and varied complexions of music theatre. Guettel's piece is the most sophisticated of hybrids requiring a whole raft of vocal colours. 'Fable', the 11 o'clock number that launched Fleming's Broadway album, delivers a Niagara of emotion in soprano mode, though the role as a whole, says Fleming, sits a lot lower in the voice than that lofty place where she normally 'lives'. The vocal adjustment required has more to do with extending the 'conversational' tone of the dialogue (and there's a lot of it) into the sung delivery than any realignment of head and chest tones.

The radio microphones deployed in musicals help, of course, doing some of the heavy lifting and enabling the eight shows a week. But, as Fleming is quick to point out, there is another dimension – a 'confidential' tone, an intimacy that is only possible when the sound is scaled back and the delivery is to some extent 'internalised'. Of course, you can only get out of a microphone what you put into it – but that scaling back of the vocal projection can open up extraordinary new colours. There's a pivotal song in *Piazza* called 'Dividing Day' and the whole point of it is that it is quietly devastating.

I vividly remember hearing the early demo tapes for the show – the lushness and spun quality of the melodic lines (full of Italianate heat and romance) preferring by far to journey than to arrive. But more vivid still was Guettel himself rolling out the prelude to the piece as if its creation was simply a process of improvisation. Perhaps it was. The piano, he casually let slip, belonged to his grandfather, Richard Rodgers. 



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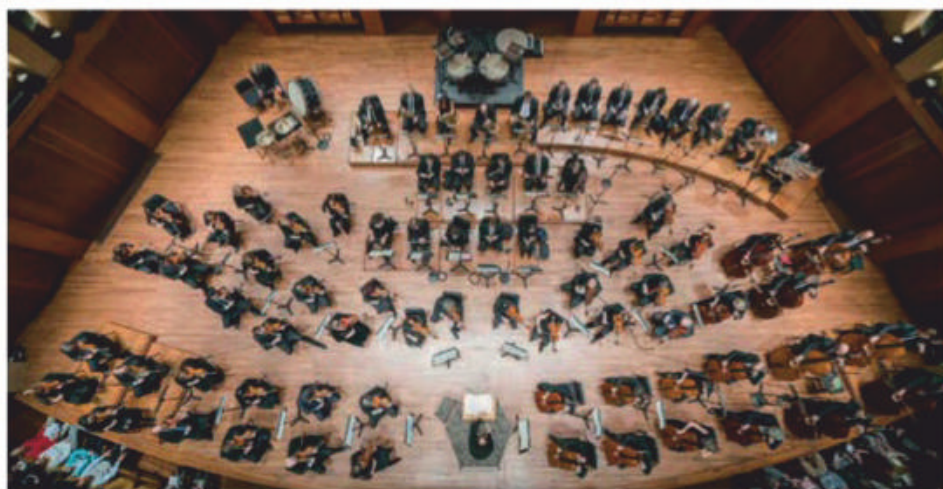
CLASSICAL MUSIC AWARDS 2019

Orchestra of the Year

We can probably all name the dozen or so great orchestras of the world. But what of the ensembles (with some great ones among them, of course) where magic happens between players and conductor, and something extraordinary takes place? That's what we celebrate with this Award, established last year and won resoundingly by the Seattle Symphony. For 2019 we're repeating the process by nominating 10 ensembles whose recordings have excited us this year. With Apple Music we've created playlists for each ensemble as well as a dynamic playlist

featuring all 10 (which will change throughout the summer). Have a listen and vote for the ensemble you think deserves the accolade 'Orchestra of the Year'. **James Jolly**

Listen to the recordings on Apple Music at
gramophone.co.uk/awards
and cast your vote by September 7



Gramophone's current Orchestra of the Year, the Seattle Symphony and their conductor Ludovic Morlot



Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin



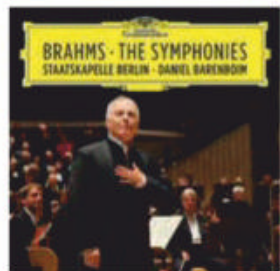
'Everything here is energy, though the exuberance is of the grounded kind that never gets out of hand,' wrote Lindsay Kemp of the AAM Berlin's Bach violin concertos with Isabelle Faust for Harmonia Mundi, a recording that demonstrates why this German period ensemble is one of the finest around today. Richly coloured, rhythmically vital and thrillingly communicative, the AAM Berlin bring great style to everything they play.

JS Bach Violin Concertos Faust; Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin (HM, 4/19)

JS Bach Dialogue Cantatas Karthäuser, Volle; Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin (HM, 7/18)

'Cantata' B Mehta; Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin (Pentatone, 1/19)

Staatskapelle Berlin



The orchestra of Berlin's State Opera has a venerable history that can be traced back to the 16th century. From the end of the war until 1990 the orchestra was in East Berlin, but since the 1992 Daniel Barenboim has been Staatskapellmeister and this year their experience, sympathy and cultivated

music-making were beautifully showcased in a set of the four Brahms symphonies for DG. Richard Osborne wrote of the performances 'rare pedigree and worth' and singled out the Second, 'where the music bides its time, rhythms are gently sprung and the stage is properly set for the symphony's culminating hallelujahs'.

Brahms Symphonies Nos 1-4 Staatskapelle Berlin / Barenboim (DG, A/18)

Boston Symphony Orchestra



Under the Latvian Andris Nelsons, the Boston SO are exploring the music of Shostakovich for DG and their lithe, colourful sound is developing real power and brilliance. 'Gosh, he has transformed the Boston Symphony in such a relatively short space of time,' wrote Edward

Seckerson, reviewing Nos 4 and 11, and he also praised the recording: 'It is fabulously engineered: a very real sense of the famed Boston Symphony Hall acoustic in depth and perspective but with a startling clarity and immediacy, all that hyperactive percussion and Mahlerian brass really making its presence felt'.

Shostakovich Symphonies Nos 4 & 11 Boston SO / Nelsons (DG, 9/18)

Busoni Piano Concerto Gerstein; Boston SO / Oramo (Myrios, 3/19)

Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra



The young Finn Santtu-Matias Rouvali is in charge of the GSO these days and, judging by the first instalment of a new Sibelius symphony cycle for Alpha, musical life there is good. ‘The Gothenberg Symphony have rarely sounded more committed,’ said Edward Seckerson, ‘the string-playing possessed of tremendous conviction in the opening pages of the second movement. I also wonder if the Trio of the Scherzo has ever sounded more obliquely mysterious given the robust certainty of what frames it.’ And with Herbert Blomstedt, the GSO played the Second Symphony by Wilhelm Stenhammar (a former GSO principal conductor) with a joyously idiomatic sense of rightness.

Sibelius Symphony No 1, etc Gothenburg SO / Rouvali (Alpha, 3/19)

Stenhammar Symphony No 2, etc Gothenburg SO / Blomstedt (BIS, 2/19)

Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra



Sharing a Music Director with the New York Phil is quite a feather in the cap of the Hong Kong Phil (and they got Jaap van Zweden first!), and his credentials as a fine orchestral trainer are borne out by the fine fettle of this 62-year-old ensemble. To record Wagner’s *Ring* is not a project to be taken lightly and the completion of this Hong Kong Naxos cycle last year crowned an impressive musical journey. As Rob Cowan comments on page 101, ‘the music has the impact of a fresh-minted epic soundtrack’, and Mike Ashman, reviewing *Götterdämmerung*, commented that ‘each instalment has represented a measurable advance on the last’. Impressive work, then, from an ensemble that has grown hugely in stature.

Wagner *Götterdämmerung* Sols; Hong Kong PO / van Zweden (Naxos, 11/18)

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra



Vasily Petrenko’s reign on Merseyside is drawing to a close – he bows out at the end of the 2020-21 season – but the RLPO remains one of the busiest recording ensembles in the UK. With Andrew Manze they’re completing a Vaughan Williams cycle of considerable merit, while with Petrenko they’ve given us some truly impressive Elgar for Onyx, their Russian conductor showing that he is as comfortable with the idiom as his players. ‘Vasily Petrenko directs an admirably trim, affectionate and cannily paced *Enigma*,’ wrote Andrew Achenbach in May, ‘free of fussy intervention and marked by superb orchestral playing.’

Elgar ‘Enigma’ Variations, etc RLPO / V Petrenko (Onyx, 5/19)

Vaughan Williams Sea Symphony Fox, Stone; RLPO / Manze (Onyx, 3/19)

Britten. Mendelssohn Violin Concertos Bohren; RLPO / Litton (RCA, 4/19)

London Symphony Orchestra



The LSO, reinvigorated since the arrival of Sir Simon Rattle in 2017, is one of the gems of the London musical scene, flexible and idiomatic in a vast range of music. Their musical sympathies range from Mozart (whose violin concertos they’ve recorded with impressive finesse alongside Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider) to contemporary fare such as the music of Helen Grime, via a superb *La damnation de Faust* under Rattle

(maintaining this orchestra’s tradition as the Berlioz ensemble par excellence) and a thrilling Shostakovich Symphony No 8 under Gianandrea Noseda. From their earliest days, the LSO have actively championed recordings and with their own label, LSO Live, that desire lives on.

Berlioz *La damnation de Faust* Sols; LSO / Rattle (LSO Live, 5/19)

Mozart Violin Concertos Nos 1-3 Szeps-Znaider; LSO (LSO Live, 2/19)

Shostakovich Symphony No 8 LSO / Noseda (LSO Live, 1/19)

Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia - Rome



Housed in Renzo Piano’s striking complex, the Parco della Musica in Rome, Italy’s oldest symphony orchestra is enjoying a new lease of life thanks to its palpably close relationship with its Music Director since 2005, Sir Antonio Pappano. *Gramophone* Awards have rewarded the partnership which, for Bernstein Year, gave us the three symphonies by the orchestra’s former President. As Edward Seckerson put it: ‘Their ethos, their extrovert nature, to say nothing of their innately operatic manner, made them a good fit. And there’s something of Bernstein’s dynamism and eclectic, all-embracing nature in the person of Antonio Pappano whose penchant for, and love of, jazz for starters ticks one of the many boxes that this music demands.’

Bernstein Symphonies Nos 1-3 Sols; Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia - Rome / Pappano (Warner Classics, 9/18)

San Francisco Symphony Orchestra

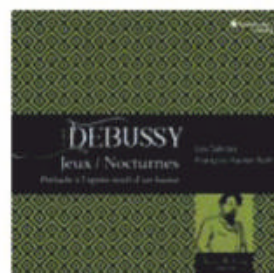


Michael Tilson Thomas, since taking up the SFSO’s reins in 1995, has developed this great West Coast ensemble into a fearless and ever-questioning orchestra with a devoted following. But all good things come to an end: MTT hands the baton to Esa-Pekka Salonen at the end of the 2019-20 season, but not before adding to his dizzyingly broad recorded catalogue. A suave and slightly underwhelming *Pathétique* (though undeniably well played) was succeeded by Berlioz’s *Roméo et Juliette* which Mike Ashman admired as a ‘typically well-prepared and fluent account’.

Berlioz *Roméo et Juliette* Sols; SFSO / Tilson Thomas (SFS Media, 2/19)

Tchaikovsky Symphony No 6 SFSO / Tilson Thomas (SFS Media, 9/18)

Les Siècles



François-Xavier Roth’s Les Siècles is a French period ensemble that has captured people’s imagination for its exploration of the music of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A winner at last year’s *Gramophone* Awards for its ravishing Harmonia Mundi account of Ravel’s complete *Daphnis et Chloé* ballet, it was inevitable that Debussy would be in the orchestra’s sights and their new album is glorious. Tim Ashley found *Jeux* wonderfully persuasive and, of the *Nocturnes*, he wrote: “‘Nuages’, with its mournful cor anglais and drifting textures, sounds very disconsolate here. “Fêtes”, all garish brilliance and light, is played with terrific agility. “Sirènes”, meanwhile, is exceptionally beautiful, even serene, in its warmth and depth.’

Debussy *Jeux. Nocturnes*, etc Les Siècles / Roth (HM, 12/18)

Berlioz *Harold en Italie. Les nuits d'été* Sols; Les Siècles / Roth (HM, 2/19)

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The hidden giants of AMERICAN MUSIC

Bernstein, Barber and buddies were terrific symphonists, but what about their lesser-known 20th-century compatriots? Gerard Schwarz flies the flag for music that deserves wider acclaim

For the most part, the great American symphonies of the middle 20th century are rarely performed. Of course, there are some exceptions: Copland's Third, Harris's Third and Bernstein's First and Second; Samuel Barber's Violin Concerto and *Adagio for Strings* are heard often, and are among his repertoire works, but his excellent Symphony No 1 is seldom done. Gershwin did not write a symphony and Ives, though respected as an American innovator, was less successful as a symphonist (though some might disagree).

The question is, are there other important American works to fit into this group that are unjustly overlooked? I believe the answer is a resounding yes. I would like to share my love and respect for the following American symphonies: Paul Creston's Third; William Schuman's Third; Alan Hovhaness's Second; David Diamond's Second; Howard Hanson's Third; Peter Mennin's Third; and Walter Piston's Fourth. I hope this journey might then interest many of you to investigate their output further.

Paul Creston 1906-85

Education is often at the core of appreciation. I was lucky enough to learn this in my early life. When my father, who was a medical doctor, realised that I was serious about becoming a musician, he wanted me to have the thorough musical education that he himself was afforded. Growing up playing piano in Mödling (a suburb of Vienna), Austria, his medical-doctor father ensured he also studied theory, harmony, counterpoint and composition with Friedrich Wildgans.

I, in turn, began piano at age five and trumpet at age nine and had been composing on my own. When I turned 13, my father decided I should have a composition teacher. He met Paul Creston (born Giuseppe Guttovveglio) at a party in New York City where Creston gave him a test pressing of his Fifth Symphony, recorded by Howard Mitchell and the National Symphony Orchestra. My father told me he thought the music was 'too modern' but well written and very powerful. Creston agreed to teach me, and I spent the next three years

going to the Hotel Ansonia in Manhattan every other week for my lessons. He was a wonderful teacher and a very opinionated musician. For my first lesson, I brought in some piano pieces and a concerto for trumpet and band. He sent me home and told me to write 50 melodies.

One lesson took place the day after Stravinsky's *The Flood* ('a musical play') was premiered on CBS television in 1962. It was written in Stravinsky's late serial style. It was such an exciting event, a Stravinsky premiere on network television. At my next lesson, Creston railed his dislike of this style of composition and explained his belief that serialism would never survive the test of time. At another lesson, he said he disliked Mahler, especially his orchestrations; he played a C major chord on the piano and said: 'If this chord is played by eight horns or the entire string section, it is still only a C major chord.'

His opinions were always based on his knowledge and respect for music. Though I did not always agree, they were always interesting and understandable. Along with Copland, Creston was one of the most performed American composers of the mid-20th century. The conductors who performed his music between 1930 and 1960 were among the most eminent: Cantelli, De Sabata, Goossens, Hanson, Monteux, Ormandy, Rodzinski, Steinberg, Stokowski, Szell and Toscanini. After 1960, much of his music had generally disappeared from the concert stage except for his works for unusual solo instruments: trombone, marimba, accordion and saxophone. Even today, a composition written for an outstanding soloist will have more performances than a symphony.

It has been extraordinary for me to restudy so many of Creston's works for this article, focusing primarily on his six symphonies, but also his shorter works for orchestra. He has a natural melodic gift; his style is very clear, both harmonically and rhythmically, and often infused with tremendous energy. Since none of his symphonies are played today, choosing just one to recommend as a work that deserves more exposure is difficult – I find them all engaging, dramatic, and beautiful. But my favourite is his Third Symphony, *Three Mysteries*, premiered by Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1950. After its premiere, it was programmed until 1963 by



Koussevitzky conducts the Boston Symphony Orchestra; between 1924 and 1949, they together championed the work of many excellent American composers

a few professional orchestras including: Chicago and Cincinnati (both Ormandy), Minnesota (Dorati), St Louis (Golschmann) and the National Symphony (Mitchell). After that period, there was a shift in acceptable compositional style – ie a move towards serialism. In the last 55 years, this great work has only been played in three sets of concerts worldwide. It has all of the Creston signature hallmarks: beautiful harmonies and melodies, somewhat mystical, colourful orchestration, and a rhythmic drive that few can rival. With programmatic elements, this symphony signifies the life and afterlife of Jesus of Nazareth.



Bernstein & Schwarz on tour with the NY Phil in 1976; the focus was on US composers

Themes of Gregorian chants are creatively configured into melodies, fugue sections, and passacaglia-like interludes, all imaginatively interwoven.

For a shorter work to investigate, listen to his *Invocation and Dance* (1953). The ‘Invocation’ section is replete with theatrical gestures and melodies, both compelling and lyrical. This material sets up the striking ‘Dance section’, which is rhythmic and flamboyant in style. Creston loved Ormandy’s conducting of his music and said that the conductor was able to balance his ideas beautifully. He complained about Stokowski’s performances, as he felt he suppressed the accompaniments, missing many of the details Ormandy highlighted. Both Ormandy and Stokowski championed Creston’s music at that time.

William Schuman 1910-92

Today, American orchestras are wonderful about programming new works. Just recently, the New York Philharmonic announced ‘Project 19’, the commissioning of 19 works to be programmed over the next few years by women composers. But to really have an impact and make these works become part of the repertoire, subsequent performances are of paramount importance. The great hero of this very mantra was Serge Koussevitzky (1874-1951), Russian-American conductor of the Boston Symphony from 1924 to 1949. He was a champion of many excellent composers, and he often did second or third performances of works he thought especially worthy, during subsequent seasons. But he was in the minority. In 1982, William Schuman – former president of the Juilliard School and Lincoln Center – spoke out on the subject, blaming the lack of second performances of American music of the 20th century on ‘the new crop of conductors (mostly foreign) who inhabit the podiums of major cities between jet trips and who obviously have no knowledge or interest in our native music’. Prior to that, in 1980, he also spelled out what he viewed as the ‘purpose of the American symphony orchestra’: firstly, ‘the systematic and continuing exploration of the great



Schwarz with Delos's Amelia Haygood and Alan Hovhaness during a 1993 session

literature of the past on a rotating basis over a period of years'; secondly, 'the systematic and purposeful effort to develop a repertory of contemporary works which have already found favour'; and thirdly, 'the introduction of new works, both by established composers and newer ones'. (These quotes are from Steve Swayne's excellent book, *Orpheus in Manhattan: William Schuman and the Shaping of America's Musical Life*, OUP, 2011.)

I do not agree with Schuman's statement about foreign conductors as they exist today. All of them conduct new American music. But to his second point, more conductors are indeed needed to uphold the music of our American history, perhaps following Bernstein's example – he was the one conductor who continued to support his composer friends into the 1970s. I vividly remember touring Europe with Bernstein and the NY Philharmonic in an all-American programme in 1976 to celebrate the US bicentennial with music of Ives, Bernstein, Harris, Copland and Gershwin – and Schuman.

Schuman lived a varied musical life and was a remarkable human being. He wrote 10 symphonies (but withdrew the first two) between 1941 and 1975, which were premiered by Koussevitzky, Rodzinski, Dorati, Munch, Bernstein and Ormandy. Each symphony has a singular point of view and makes strong compelling individual statements. His music is more severe than the other works highlighted here, but the strength of his personality and his technical command makes each work special. I think the Third Symphony, uniquely based on traditional Baroque form, shows Schuman at his intricate best. Weaving melody, pacing, pulse and lyricism, he sculpts the passacaglia, fugue, chorale and toccata into defined sections and movements. The final *Toccata* movement is a mini concerto for orchestra, including extended solos for snare drum and bass clarinet. This symphony is the one that should be played often and everywhere. It does get a performance every few years, but hardly enough to match its greatness. His *Variations on America*, based on Ives, and his *New England Triptych* are performed more often, and the *New England Triptych* in particular may be a good entry into his language.

Alan Hovhaness 1911-2000

I met Alan Hovhaness when I was 16, recording his work for trumpet and band, *Return and Rebuild the Desolate Places*. His music is played often, but usually by student groups. It is very tuneful, usually not too difficult to perform, and each piece selectively is evocative of the music of Armenia, India, Hawaii,



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Schwarz and Diamond (left), with whom Schwarz worked during his time in Seattle; rehearsing the orchestra in 1997 – three years later they premiered Diamond's Tenth

Japan, Korea or America. Hovhaness was always a very spiritual person, drawing on nature for inspiration. He also prided himself on his use of counterpoint, and was disappointed his works were not studied in counterpoint classes.

He was highly prolific, having written nearly 70 symphonies. Like Haydn, the ones with titles are the ones most often programmed. His Second Symphony, *Mysterious Mountain*, combines traditional white-note melodies and harmonies with an underlying accompaniment often sounding not only harmonically unrelated but gesturing apart from the main material. The work has numerous solos for woodwinds and brass. It also contains an extraordinary double fugue in the second movement, and it ends with an exquisite full-bodied chorale for the entire orchestra. It was premiered by Stokowski during his opening concert as music director of the Houston Symphony in 1955. Reiner recorded it with Chicago in 1958, which helped make Hovhaness's reputation. In the last 15 years, while it has had many performances, I could only find a handful by professional orchestras other than my own. In fact, when I recorded it for PBS television with the All-Star Orchestra in 2016, many members of the orchestra, loving the work, asked why they had never heard the piece before. These were players from America's most important orchestras. Most composers of his time did not accept Hovhaness into their circle because of his simpler style.

David Diamond 1915-2005

Some composers, such as Howard Hanson (see right) and Lou Harrison, were more accepting of Hovhaness, though, and I also remember David Diamond speaking highly of him during our time together in Seattle. David himself wrote 11 symphonies between 1940 and 1992. The list of conductors and orchestras who premiered his works is impressive: Symphony No 1: New York Philharmonic and Mitropoulos; Symphony No 2: Boston Symphony and Koussevitzky; Symphonies Nos 3/4: Boston and Munch/Bernstein; Nos 5 & 8: New York Philharmonic and Bernstein; No 6: Boston and Munch; No 7: Philadelphia Orchestra and Ormandy; No 9: American Composers Orchestra and Bernstein; No 10: Seattle Symphony and Schwarz; No 11: New York Philharmonic and Masur. The first four are in a traditional 'American' style and then, beginning with No 5, they become more chromatic. No 4 is the easiest to programme because it's only 16 minutes; I have conducted it 41 times, and it is always a wonderful success with

orchestras and audiences alike. But for me, the symphony most in need of repeated performances is his magnificent wartime Second Symphony (1942) – in my opinion, one of the greatest of the American symphonies of the 20th century. Its breath and scope is broad, opening with a darkly brooding, funereal first movement. The second movement scherzo is dynamic, with surprising orchestrations and rhythmic interjections. The third movement showcases Diamond's melodic gift for *Andante espressivo*. And the fourth movement concludes with a propulsive rondo finale. Among the reasons it is never programmed is its 42-minute length. In general, a fine contemporary work of up to 10 minutes will receive a good number of performances, but as works become longer, the number of performances decline. I love all the Diamond symphonies, but the passion, drama, beauty and intensity of the Second make it his masterpiece.

Prior to the Koussevitzky premiere of Diamond's Second, Rodzinski studied the work and decided to have the New York Philharmonic do a reading. He asked his assistant, Bernstein, to conduct it, and when Bernstein told Diamond, Diamond was thrilled and very excited to hear his new symphony for the first time. Bernstein informed Diamond that Rodzinski never allowed visitors to his rehearsals and Diamond would not be allowed to attend. Diamond took the situation into his own hands – he sneaked into Carnegie Hall and lay on the floor of the balcony thinking he would never be found. Of course he wanted to hear his symphony! He was discovered and escorted out of the hall. Diamond went next door to the Russian Tea Room and sat at the bar drinking for the next three hours. When Bernstein and Rodzinski arrived, an inebriated Diamond, probably 10 inches shorter than Rodzinski, punched the conductor on the nose. After that experience, Copland and Bernstein paid for Diamond to see a psychiatrist. I played my Seattle Symphony recording of the Diamond Second Symphony for Bernstein at his Dakota apartment in the spring of 1990, just a few months before he died. He genuinely loved hearing the work again and said he would start playing more American music ...

Howard Hanson 1896-1981

Diamond taught at Juilliard, but lived most of his life in Rochester, commuting to New York City to teach. Howard Hanson also lived in Rochester for most of his life and was a great supporter of the conservative style of American music during his time as the director of the Eastman School of

Music (1924-64). When I was asked to conduct the Rochester Philharmonic in 1998, I suggested a programme of Diamond and Hanson. They refused because they were afraid it would negatively affect ticket sales. I declined the invitation. The following year they reconsidered, and in 1999 I did the Second Symphonies of both Diamond and Hanson to a full and enthusiastic audience.

I first heard Hanson's music when I was a very young student at the National Music Camp at Interlochen Michigan. The main theme from his Second Symphony was the Interlochen Theme and was played at the conclusion of every concert, usually conducted by the concertmaster. During the summer of 1960 I was given that honour – it was probably the first work that I ever conducted. To me, Hanson was a composer like Beethoven or Brahms; I was too young to realise that there was a difference. Once, when I was being interviewed at the beginning of a Seattle Symphony season by Melinda Bargreen of the *Seattle Times*, our two-year old daughter Gabriella was asked by Melinda who her favourite composers were and she responded, 'Beethoven and David Diamond'. If I had been asked that at Interlochen in 1960, I would probably have said Sibelius and Howard Hanson.

Hanson wrote seven symphonies and these were the first that I recorded for Delos Records' American Classics Series (now released on Naxos). When I first started performing these works, the critical response was more negative than I had hoped. Yet Amelia Haygood and Carol Rosenberger wanted to start our American series with Hanson. I was nervous because reviews affect sales. But Amelia and Carol were correct, the recordings were a tremendous success with excellent sales; they led to Grammy nominations and launched our series of so many of the American mid-century composers.

I remember Peter Mennin telling me, when we were discussing 12-tone music, that the most important aspect of being a great composer was having a distinct voice. Hanson, like all the composers here, has a distinct musical personality. His Third Symphony is emblematic of this voice with beautiful thematic material, his typical pedal points (especially in the first movement), a poetic slow movement, a vibrant scherzo opening with the timpani, and a final movement coalescing all his melodic and sequential material in an orchestration reminiscent of the great Romantic symphonies. Koussevitzky was again the hero. While Hanson himself conducted the premiere with the Boston Symphony in 1939, Koussevitzky clearly admired the work and conducted it on six sets of concerts from 1939 to 1945. Those were the last BSO performances to date. When the New York Philharmonic commissioned a Sixth Symphony from Hanson for the orchestra's 125th anniversary, Bernstein invited the composer to conduct the premiere. That may have been a mistake. Had Bernstein conducted it, maybe he would have become its champion.

Peter Mennin 1923-83

Peter Mennin (originally Mennini) attended Hanson's Eastman School of Music. Mennin's main compositional focus was the symphony, composing nine in total. He was a very successful president of the Juilliard School (1962, following Schuman until 1983) but only composed about 30 works. His music is very rarely played today. On occasion one will see his *Concertato*, *Moby Dick* (1952) programmed, but little else. *Moby Dick* is a wonderful entry into Mennin's language, but the piece that I feel represents his best symphony is his Third (1946). It was premiered by the New York Philharmonic and Walter

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Conductor on a mission: Schwarz's championing of US composers continues today

Hendl, and subsequently performed by Mitropoulos, Szell, Rodzinski, Reiner, Schippers and others. In his *Stereo Review* appraisal of my 1995 recording, David Hall wrote that it was one of Mennin's best, comprising 'an opening movement that packs a wallop comparable to the opening of the Vaughan Williams Fourth Symphony. A splendid long line is sustained throughout the slow movement, and a relentless drive manifests itself in the finale.'

Walter Piston 1894-1976

The music of Walter Piston is without the stylistic muscle of his peers. Lighter in texture, more relaxed, less angular, and incorporating variety with elegance, the Fourth Symphony (1950) is a wonderful example of the natural quality of his output. In four movements, it features expressive and melodic breath, refined use of syncopation and hints of jazz. Even the titles of the movements are reflective of his stylistic intent: *Piacevole* ('peacefully'), *Ballando* ('dancing'), *Contemplativo* and *Energico*. His eight symphonies were premiered by the best orchestras of the day: Boston (Nos 1,3,6 & 8), National Symphony Orchestra (No 2), Juilliard Orchestra (No 5), Minneapolis (No 4) and Philadelphia (No 7). He became primarily known as a teacher at Harvard and the author of three excellent books on music. As a result, he was sometimes criticised for being an academically rigid composer. Of course, I disagree. There is no question in my mind that he wrote very well-crafted compositions, which are as beautiful as they are technically sound.

Seven distinctive voices



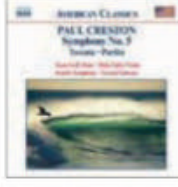
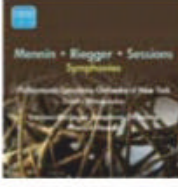



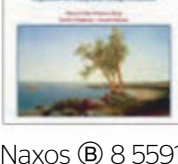
With the exception of Piston and Hanson, I was fortunate to have known all the composers featured here. As we look back on their output we can be reflective of their place in history and their distinctive yet similar voices. Of the seven, four of them – Schuman, Diamond, Mennin and Creston – were schooled similarly in counterpoint, harmony, melody, rhythm and orchestration. Others in this same category include Copland, Bernstein, Barber and Harris. All their works, though individual, are evocative of their time and era, in the same vein as the composers of the late-18th century Austro-German school. Though also of their time, the other

three here – Hovhaness, Hanson and Piston – stand apart in their own way from the traditional American symphonists. Hanson harkens back to the Romanticism of the late-19th century. Hovhaness is a non-traditional mystic colourist. Piston is stylistically the leanest and the most transparent, with a distinct French influence.

When I made that Hovhaness recording for PBS in 2017 with the All-Star Orchestra, I also recorded the Eugene Goossens *Jubilee Variations* (1945). Written for the 50th anniversary of the Cincinnati Symphony, the piece evolved after Goossens asked some of America's great composers to write a variation on his original theme. Those who accepted his invitation included Creston, Copland, Taylor, Hanson, Schuman, Piston, Harris, Fuleihan, Rogers and Bloch. Each 'variation' beautifully showcases each composer's quintessential voice, uniting some of the most significant musical voices of America at that time. Perhaps one day they will each achieve their deserved place in the symphonic cannon, as other great 20th-century symphonists have before them. 6

Gerard Schwarz has been appointed a Distinguished Professor of Music at the Frost School of Music; he has also recently accepted the position as Music Director of the Palm Beach Symphony

Recommended listening (& watching) Schwarz et al play US symphonies

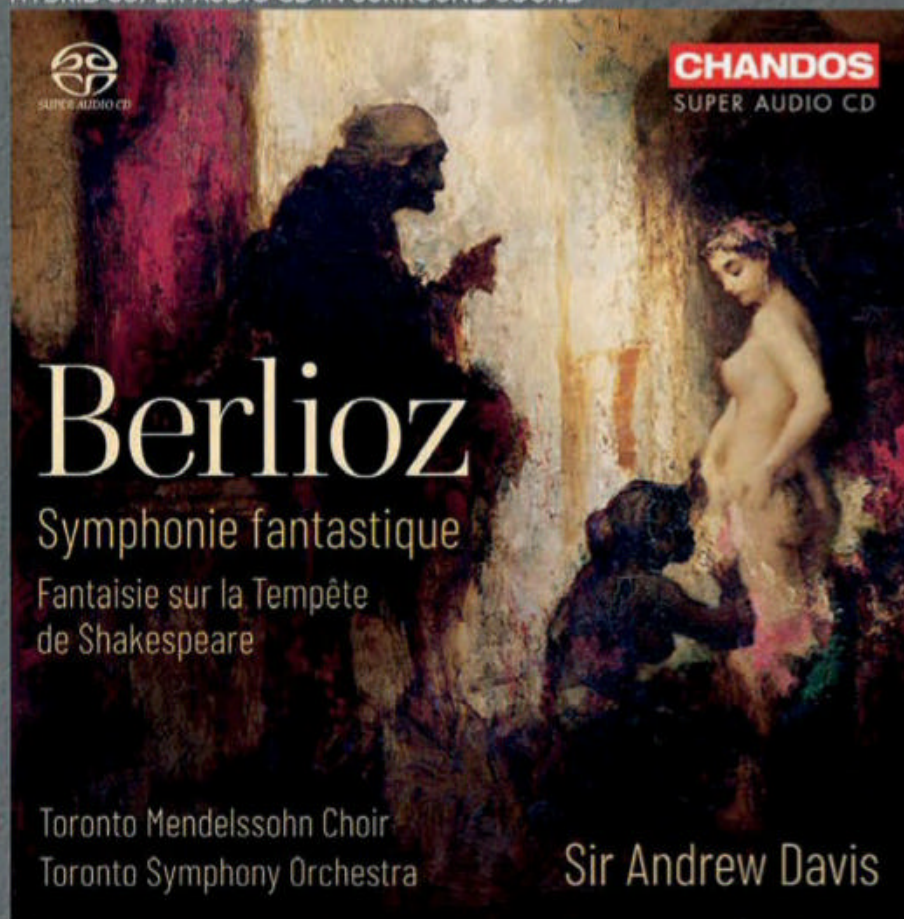
 <p>Paul Creston: Symphony No 3, Op 48, 'Three Mysteries' Seattle Symphony / Gerard Schwarz Naxos © 8 571203 (12/92)</p>	 <p>Howard Hanson: Symphony No 3 (and other works) Eastman-Rochester Orchestra and Chorus / Howard Hanson Mercury Living Presence © 434 3022</p>
 <p>Paul Creston: Invocation and Dance (and other works) Seattle Symphony / Gerard Schwarz Naxos © 8 559153 (4/04)</p>	 <p>Peter Mennin: Symphony No 3 (rec 1954) New York Philharmonic / Dimitri Mitropoulos Naxos © 980248 (3/55)</p>
 <p>William Schuman: Symphony No 3 New York Philharmonic / Leonard Bernstein DG © 419 7802 (11/87)</p>	 <p>Alan Hovhaness: Symphony No 2 Dallas Symphony Orchestra / Andrew Litton Dorian © DOR90224 (6/00)</p>
 <p>David Diamond: Symphony No 2 (and No 4) Seattle Symphony / Gerard Schwarz Naxos © 8 559154 (9/04)</p>	 <p>Walter Piston: Symphony No 4 (and other works) Seattle Symphony / Gerard Schwarz Naxos © 8 559162 (7/03)</p>

In addition to the recommending listening above, two DVDs on Naxos are worth exploring: 'Masterpieces for Symphonic Band, Programmes 1-3' (United States Marine Band / Schwarz), which features Schuman's 'New England Triptych', and 'The All-Star Orchestra & Gerard Schwarz: Programmes 15 & 16', which includes Hovhaness's Second Symphony and Goossens's 'Jubilee Variations'; for more information on the All-Star Orchestra, visit allstarorchestra.org

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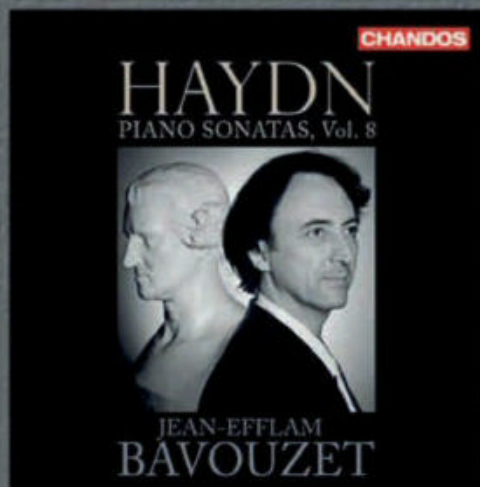
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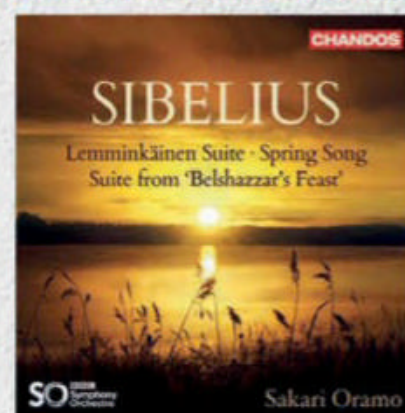


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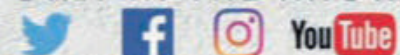
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The first time I met Lionel Meunier was the day that changed his life. I'm not claiming credit, you understand. It's just that September 27, 2012 – when he came to London to accept a *Gramophone* Award in the Baroque Vocal category on behalf of his vocal ensemble Vox Luminis for their recording of Schütz's *Musicalische Exequien*, and to his very evident surprise also went home with the overall Recording of the Year – was the end of one existence for him and the beginning of another.

Meunier – French, very tall, and very much a charmer – smiles as he remembers it: 'You could definitely look back on it in terms of what went before and what came after. When we made that recording we were doing about six concerts a year. It was our third CD, we released it in 2011, and some good reviews came in, so it was like the water was bubbling a little. But at the same

time we were having a crisis – we were thinking, "This isn't going anywhere fast, should we stop?" But we won a Diapason d'Or and started to get a few more concerts, so we decided to continue. Then at the *Gramophone* ceremony, suddenly London promoters were coming up to me and giving me their cards, agents were asking for meetings, a man who turned out to be Eric Whitacre approached me and said he wanted to write a piece for us (we couldn't afford it) ... We were actually in the middle of recording the next CD at that time, so when I went back to France the next day I turned off my phone and my computer so I wouldn't get distracted, and then three days later I realised from the amount of emails and phone calls and messages I'd had that, wow, this seemed to be something very big happening to us. Somebody was stirring that bubbling water with a very big spoon.'

It is fair to say that *Gramophone*'s premier award does not always work quite such wonders for its recipients – but then the winners are not usually little-known vocal ensembles from Belgium with only three CDs to their name, recording for a small independent label (Ricercar), and performing sacred music from 17th-century Germany. Vox Luminis's recording of Schütz's extraordinarily beautiful German-language Requiem really was something special, however – a performance

whose care, depth and nobility were a perfect match for the music, reaching out beyond just lovers of the Baroque. 'We had no idea such a thing could happen, and we had no infrastructure to handle it. The same thing happened to Peter Phillips [surprise winner of Recording of the Year in 1987 with The Tallis Scholars and Josquin]. I met him, actually, and he was very helpful – we had a good talk together.'

It certainly wasn't what Meunier was anticipating when he formed the group back in 2004. 'I was in my last year as a recorder student at the Institut Supérieur de Musique et de Pédagogie in Namur, Belgium, but I'd got into singing and been a member of the World Youth Choir, which was also based in Namur.

My idea was to do the Domenico Scarlatti *Stabat mater* with one voice to a part, just 10 singers, and because I guessed it would be

a long time before anyone asked *me* to do it, I thought I'd better form my own group, and so we performed it with Carissimi's *Jephthé* in the chapel at the college. From then I knew what I wanted to do, which was to have an ensemble that would do one project a year – a week or two of rehearsals and three or four concerts of music that was really special to us. I don't know if it would be possible for us to do that these days, but back then we had no ambition beyond that, and everything happened by itself. Nobody got paid for rehearsing, people were just motivated. After a while they started to say, "It's good. What next?" and I would say, "I just spent all the money in my account!"

The first significant change came after an encounter in 2006 with the musicologist and producer Jérôme Lejeune, *éminence* behind the Ricercar label. 'I was singing on a recording with Cappella Pratensis which Jérôme was producing, and during a break he called me to the back of the church and said, "You have a reputation for having a good ear for singers, and from the remarks you were making while we were recording I'd be interested to know if you could recommend a group to sing the Scarlatti *Stabat mater* with solo voices to mark 250 years since his death." Well my head was practically exploding, and I said, "Yes, there's *my* group!" He said, "What group?" and I said, "I've got a demo in my bag with the Scarlatti

'After the Awards I thought, wow, this is something very big. Somebody was stirring that bubbling water with a very big spoon!'



PHOTOGRAPHY: TOM BLATON





Meunier (far left) and Vox Luminis at Bach en Combrailles festival in August 2007, soon after recording their first CD: Scarlatti's 10-part Stabat mater, with one voice per part

on it." Two days later he was asking us to record it for Ricercar. Lucky timing for us!

No doubt this is how it is for many a youthful ensemble finding its way: establishing your own sound and ethos, rehearsing hard, doing a lot of work for free, getting some lucky breaks. But Vox Luminis was always a group with its own character, performance integrity and evident love for the music it was presenting. And their sound is gorgeous. 'We weren't deliberately reacting to what other groups we knew were doing or anything like that. I was maybe imagining voices that were bright, "luminous", through good use of overtones; and rich, by bringing in singers with strong personalities that wouldn't be lost through singing in a consort, but at the same time could together create a very special blended sound.'

Because Vox Luminis is not a choir but a vocal consort, the importance of having good and reliable individual voices, any one of which can be required to sing in solos, duets or trios, is crucial. 'I can't describe in words what's in my head when I hear a voice. I don't do auditions, but I just know that when I hear a voice I can say, "Yes, this is one that could fit in the group." For the Schütz I had to wait until I found four suitable tenors – I needed one that was not a tenor but not a baritone, and when I found Olivier Berten I wrote to him that same night. And from the beginning I was obsessed with tuning – good tuning brings sound. And I'm not against vibrato. We have some, but I wanted to find a way of making the voice

free without vibrating so much that it works against the cleanness of the chords.'

Perhaps, though, the greatest difficulty when things get busier and more complicated is keeping hold of what you started with – the idealism, the enthusiasm, the vision of what you want to achieve as musicians. Meunier is well aware of the importance

of that, as well as there being something else, something maybe non-musical, that can hold a group together. 'When I was in the World Youth Choir I was struck by the power of one generation,

how an ensemble with a maximum age difference of about six or seven years and with members from many different countries could come together and make such a rich sound. That's what really stuck in my mind, this idea of having people from the same generation, living at the same stage in their lives.'

That ideal has certainly held. When, in March, Vox Luminis

gave a 15th-anniversary concert that reprised the Scarlatti–Carissimi programme of their debut concert in the same venue in Namur, there were three members who had been there at the beginning, plus a fourth who'd been in the first audience, while more than half of them had been in the group for over 10 years. 'Of course, the sound has changed as we have got older. And I'm not the same man I was when I was 22. Then, I had a bright and young sound in my mind, and although I wouldn't say that that has changed completely, it has evolved. I'm searching a bit less for the clean sound and more for colour and the right kind of intensity. And now when a singer leaves us, I have

'I'm not the same man I was when I was 22. Then, I had a bright and young sound in my mind – but that has now evolved'



Eric Whitacre presents Meunier (left) with a Gramophone Award in 2012




During a recording session in September 2018 in Gedinne, Belgium, for the new release featuring cantatas by three members of the Bach family

my radar on for voices that will push me towards new repertoire – for instance, I never had an *haut-contre* for French Baroque before I met Reinoud Van Mechelen; and an English countertenor like Alex Chance is able to help us do Handel, Purcell and Blow.’

It is German repertoire, however, that seems to remain at the heart of Vox Luminis’s work. As well as the Schütz, their discography regularly dips into the rich sacred outputs of Buxtehude, Fux, Kerll, Keiser, Scheidt and assorted composers of the Lutheran Reformation, and motets by JS Bach’s older cousins Johann Christoph and Johann Michael. ‘I love German music,’ says Meunier. ‘It’s not just about the quality, it’s about the fact that it speaks directly to you. Composers in the 16th and 17th centuries were coming out of the Reformation excited to write music in their own language instead of Latin. When I take a Schütz score and look at it, it’s so clear what you have to do. The harmony delivers the text so clearly. This is the music I prefer, more than French music actually, and I like to gather musicians around me who love it as well.’

Their newest release goes back to those two older Bachs and their father, Heinrich, all of whom lived and worked at one time or another in Arnstadt, where JS Bach himself was an organist in his second job, from 1703 to 1707 (the year he married Johann Michael’s daughter Maria Barbara in a nearby village). The focus in this project that Meunier calls The Arnstadt Line is on church cantatas with instrumental accompaniment, and, he says, ‘pretty soon I had in my mind JS Bach’s Easter cantata *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, which we realised came from the same tradition, and which we also included’. This work, one of Bach’s more familiar cantatas today, is not one that can be dated precisely; was it for Easter Day in 1707 in Arnstadt (making it his first surviving church cantata), or for Easter 1708 in Mühlhausen,

where he was working by then? – which would place it after cantatas such as *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit* (BWV106) and *Aus der Tiefen* (BWV131), even though in many ways it seems more old-fashioned in style. ‘I’ve always had a fascination for Bach’s early cantatas, and, of course, I got into his influences as well, such as Buxtehude and Pachelbel. I thought, “Who knows, what if Bach actually composed *Christ lag* in Arnstadt, just after he had visited Buxtehude in Lübeck in 1705-06?” It makes sense if you think of his cantatas in the context of those earlier works by his relatives and perform them in that same consort scoring and performing style, like we do, and not from the angle of the more Italianate style of his later Leipzig cantatas.’

It is great to see that that idea of ‘consort style’ is something that has not been lost in the heady whirl of Vox Luminis’s success. Meunier still sings bass within the group, leading performances with the most discreet of gestures, even in works like Purcell’s *King Arthur*, Handel’s *Dixit Dominus* or Bach’s B minor Mass (as you can see on YouTube). And although he has had plenty of offers to conduct elsewhere, his first loyalty is definitely to the group. ‘One of the best things now is that I have some power to be able to discuss projects I would like to do, like *Spem in alium* for my 40th birthday. People don’t laugh at my dreams any more! But seriously, we had a beautiful present that day in 2012, and I still want to share it with the group. These are the people that trusted me, and they deserve that we enjoy this success together. Standing on the stage at the *Gramophone Awards*, I still didn’t know what was ahead, that the lives of maybe 30 to 40 people were about to change. Not having ambitions is what has made it possible, and now we go from joy to joy. It’s what makes it special for us all.’ 

Vox Luminis’s new Bach CD will be reviewed in the next issue

‘Now I can discuss projects I’d like to do – like “Spem in alium” for my 40th birthday. People don’t laugh at my dreams any more!’



HANDEL

WITH ATTITUDE

Forget the rivalry – it's the music that matters, finds Alexandra Coghlan as she meets sopranos Lucy Crowe and Mary Bevan and London Early Opera's Bridget Cunningham, who've recorded Cuzzoni and Bordoni's most dazzling arias

'Signiora *Faustina*, a famous Italian Lady, is coming over this Winter to rival Signiora Cuzzoni ...', the *London Journal* wrote in September 1725. An innocuous piece of news at first glance, it was in fact the first warning shot in a dispute that would rage ferociously through the British press and society, prompting battle lines to be drawn in London's smartest drawing rooms, even dividing the royal family itself.

London was a city still newly in thrall to Italian opera. The success of Handel's *Rinaldo* in 1711 had established a hunger for a new kind of entertainment and for the exotic European singers who could provide it. In 1719 the Royal Academy of Music (not connected to the conservatoire) was founded in order to ensure a steady supply of Italian opera in London, and it immediately appointed Handel to travel to the Continent and contract 'such singer or singers fit to perform on the English stage'.

The focus may have been on the famous castratos (Senesino was especially requested), but it was the sopranos – two in particular – who would cause the biggest public stir.

Nicknamed the 'Rival Queens', sopranos Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni would become the focus of a peculiarly British kind of public frenzy, generating hot-headed factions, producing numerous satirical attacks and on at least one occasion disrupting a performance, when hissing and catcalling from the audience overwhelmed the onstage action. Tensions reached such a peak that, according to courtier Lord Hervey, 'No Cuzzonist will go to a tavern with a Faustinian; and the ladies of one party have scratched those of the other out of their list of visits.'

The competition between these two artists has become an accepted commonplace of musical history, but conductor and harpsichordist Bridget Cunningham, director of London Early Opera and of Signum's current Handel series, believes that we should treat this famous rivalry with suspicion.

'I think it was very much a London invention. We know that Cuzzoni and Bordoni had already performed together for three seasons in Italy, where it was entirely the normal thing to have two house sopranos. There were no issues. But in England it was as though the press had set them up as bitter rivals even before they had arrived. You have the *London Journal* reporting in 1723: "As soon as Cuzzoni's time is out we are to have another over; for we are well assured Faustina, the fine songstress at Venice, is invited, whose voice, they say, exceeds

what we have already here." Bordoni didn't arrive until 1726. It was all very much a set-up.

'Of course, the audiences loved it and divided almost immediately into rival factions who would boo and hiss during performances, but the singers themselves were worried about it. We know from their letters that they found it very upsetting, and that it took away from what they were doing on stage. And it certainly wasn't the kind of attention or notoriety that the Royal Academy, which was looking very much to the long term, was seeking for their company.'

The latest volume of Cunningham's Handel series, the double-disc 'Handel's Queens', invites listeners to approach the two sopranos not through the gossipy pamphlets and

colourful reports of the day, but via the music that Handel and his contemporaries (including Hasse, Vivaldi, Bononcini and Porpora) wrote for these exceptional voices.

Many are world-premiere

recordings – a process of discovery for sopranos Lucy Crowe and Mary Bevan, who recreate the roles made famous by Cuzzoni and Bordoni respectively.

'Getting to know Cuzzoni's voice through the music that was written for her has been an interesting journey,' Crowe explains. 'She was clearly an artist capable of anything and everything. Handel and his contemporaries really pushed her, expecting her to use all of her skills – *messa di voce*, precise trills, brilliant intonation. I've been challenged by the sheer variety of the arias, from imitating a bird with trills and staccato notes, to deeply heartfelt laments with powerful crescendos and almost whispered *pianissimos*. I get the sense of a woman who had a huge talent and absolutely no fear.'

To the public, Cuzzoni and Bordoni were two very different musicians, each known for her own signature style. Cuzzoni, the elder by just a year, was regarded as the queen of pathos, celebrated for the more old-fashioned, almost vulnerable beauty of her vocal line – an 'innocent and affecting' delivery which, according to flautist Johann Joachim Quantz, 'took possession of the soul of every auditor'. 'She had this very beautiful, sympathetic voice,' agrees Crowe, 'and it's said that her high notes were unrivalled in sweetness and purity.'

The beautiful Bordoni, by contrast, was known for her fiery coloratura, 'diamantine' tone and bold delivery. Wide leaps, dramatic *martellatos* and sudden changes of register were her stock-in-trade, reflected in the spitting ferocity of 'Gelosia, spietata Aletto' from Handel's *Admeto* and even more clearly

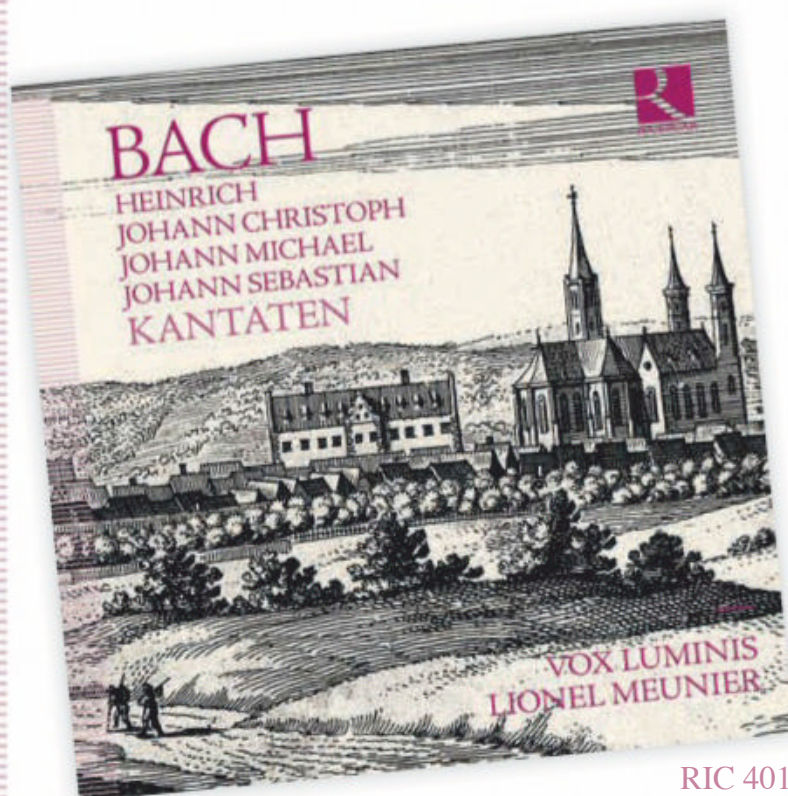
'Getting to know Cuzzoni's voice through music written for her, I sense a woman with huge talent and no fear' – Lucy Crowe

BACH

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JOHANN SEBASTIAN
KANTATEN



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LIONEL MEUNIER



RIC 401

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Gramophone Magazine

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in the florid agility of 'Alla sua gabbia d'oro' from the composer's *Alessandro* – the first opera in which both sopranos appeared in London, in 1726. It's a role well suited to Bevan, whose voice Crowe describes as 'richer, more chocolatey and sumptuous' than her own brighter instrument. But such pigeonholing is unhelpful when it comes to grasping the true scope of these two voices, each of which was much more than just one single style. 'I bet you anything that those two women could have swapped roles and sung each other's arias brilliantly,' says Bevan.

This is an argument borne out by the chronology of these two discs, which traces the singers' development from their earliest Italian engagements through their shared London years to later careers singing Hasse and Leo. It starts with more clearly defined, contrasting roles but this soon blurs as the composers become more familiar with each voice and its capacity. And so we end up getting purity and pathos from Bordoni (Handel's exquisite 'Solitudine amate' with its pair of bosky recorders) and coloratura fireworks from Cuzzoni (Cleopatra's exhilarating 'Da tempeste' from *Giulio Cesare* and 'Scoglio d'immota fronte' from *Scipione*). 'Handel really did nurture and train his singers,' says Cunningham. 'It's an aspect of his work which is often overlooked, and part of the reason behind this project to explore these two great voices.'

But how does this image of Handel as benevolent mentor and teacher square with the infamous tale of one of his early encounters with Cuzzoni? The early Handel biographer John Mainwaring reported the scene between the soprano, who refused to sing the aria 'Falsa imagine' from *Ottone*, and the composer. Handel, according to Mainwaring, was so unimpressed by this 'she-devil' that he proceeded to pick her up by the waist and threatened to throw her out of the window.

Cunningham sees no conflict. 'Handel was a very witty man and a huge personality. At that time in parts of Germany,



Crowe sings Cuzzoni: recording 'Handel's Queens' at St Augustine's Church, Kilburn, London

'Their voices must have had a lot less air coming through – there are arias where the breaths are superhuman' – Mary Bevan

or annotated scores to show us the precise virtuosity that was whipping London into such passionate excitement. 'We do have a statement from a satirical speech of the period,' says Bevan, 'which describes the divas' cadenzas as lasting for an hour! Obviously that's an exaggeration, but I think they must have been a lot longer and more florid than we are used to hearing today.'


Cunningham agrees.

'I think you have to imagine something closer to those huge violin cadenzas that Vivaldi wrote, and fill that out with what we know from

contemporary sources about the turns and trills that were fashionable at the time. We're lucky that we do have treatises by people like Pier Francesco Tosi and Giovanni Battista Mancini, which give us a good idea of the style.'

But if Handel's 'costly canaries' were the benchmark of their age, how does their technical skill compare with that of today's singers? 'I feel that their voices must have been a lot more focused,' says Bevan, 'with a lot less air coming through the vocal chords so that they could last longer on one breath. There are some arias where the breaths are just superhuman. Of course, the venues then were generally smaller, so they wouldn't have had to project quite as much as we do in opera houses today.'

And what of Cunningham's own 'rival queens'? Tales of competitive jealousy are still rife in the opera house today, but Bevan is having none of it: 'When I left music college, I thought

it would be a bit of a lonely world, but it's really not – so many of my best friends are sopranos. In terms of this project, it was actually me who suggested Lucy for it. I was trying to think of someone with a voice totally different from mine and she instantly came to mind. Lucy is such a stylish idiomatic singer, and doesn't sound like anyone else, so we make a naturally good contrast.' 

For the review of 'Handel's Queens' see next issue



'Handel's Queens' flank their director, from left: Lucy Crowe, Bridget Cunningham and Mary Bevan

GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Richard Lawrence is full of admiration for exemplary performances of Charpentier's sacred music by Ensemble Correspondances and Sébastien Daucé



M-A Charpentier

'Histoires sacrées'

Cæcilia, virgo et martyr octo vocibus, H397.
 Dialogus inter Christum et homines, H417. Dialogus
 inter Christum et peccatores, H425/425a. Élévation,
 H408. Dialogus inter Magdalenam et Jesum, H423.
 Judith, sive Bethulia liberata, H391. Mors Saülis et
 Jonathæ, H403. Motet pour les trépassés, H311.
 Pestis Mediolanensis, H398/398a

Ensemble Correspondances /

Sébastien Daucé org/hpd

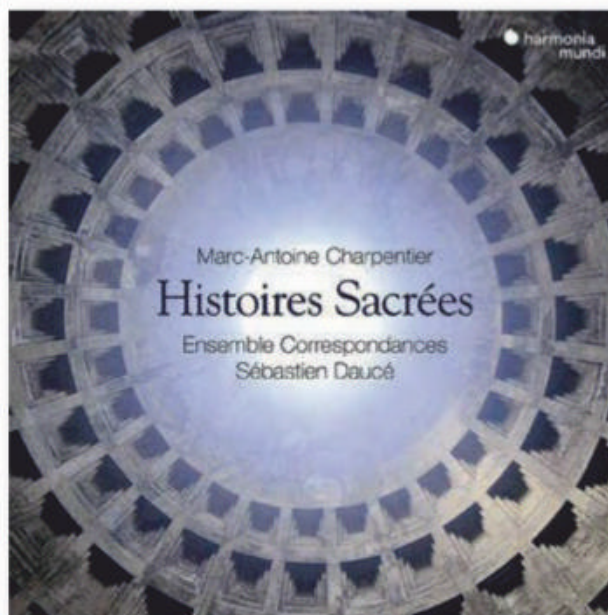
Harmonia Mundi ® (two CDs + )

HMM90 2280/81 (161' • DDD • T/t •

98' • NTSC • 16:9 • PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Bonus DVD recorded live 2016

This is superb. Here is a generous selection of sacred pieces by Charpentier, impeccably performed by Ensemble Correspondances under Sébastien Daucé. Most were composed at the behest of the Duchess de Guise, Charpentier's deeply religious employer, whose household included a substantial complement of singers and instrumentalists. The CDs include three substantial *histoires sacrées*, each one lasting between 30 and 40 minutes. All have named characters, the story entrusted to one or more narrators. The first is *Cecilia, Virgin and Martyr*, probably composed in 1677. Cecilia's husband and his brother Tiburtius, having converted to Christianity, are executed by Almachius. Cecilia then suffers the same fate. The drama proceeds swiftly, with a touch of Monteverdian *stile concitato*; the final chorus celebrates Cecilia as the patron saint of music, reeling off the 'well-tuned cymbals' and other instruments familiar from Psalm 150. Nicolas Brooymans's forceful Almachius has a true match in the robustly defiant Cecilia of Judith Fa.



'In the grim tale of Judith, who saved the city of Bethulia from capture, the effect is of Charpentier bursting to tell the story'



Sébastien Daucé directs glorious performances

Next comes the grim tale, familiar from many an Old Master, of Judith, who saved the city of Bethulia from capture by gaining admission to the tent of Holofernes, the Assyrian commander, and cutting off his head as he slept. Composed in 1675, the piece starts suddenly with a chorus of Assyrians. Perhaps a prelude is missing; but the effect is of Charpentier bursting to tell the story. Caroline Weynants is by turns challenging, faux-submissive and triumphant; and one can't help but feel sorry for Renaud Bres's eminently reasonable Holofernes. The two parts are separated by 'Night', ravishingly played by three bass viols: a picture in sound that looks forward to Orpheus's 'Cessez, cessez, fameux coupables' in *La descente d'Orphée aux enfers*. As in *Caecilia*, there's a final chorus of jubilation.

The third of these concert mini-dramas is *The Death of Saul and Jonathan*, composed around 1682. The latter doesn't appear but Saul does, starting with his visit to the Witch of Endor. The mezzo Lucile Richardot is very fine as the witch, raising Samuel in what is virtually a scena in itself. Nicolas Brooymans, a very palpable ghost, is accompanied by the buzzing sound of a regal. The chorus has striking harmonic clashes at 'acerba' ('grievous') and 'amara' ('bitter') when lamenting the deaths; David's own lament for Jonathan, beautifully sung by David Cornillot, is underpinned by violins, recorders and those plangent viols. The whole work is on a par with an equally dramatic piece, Purcell's magnificent 'In guilty night', which appeared some 10 years later.

The shorter numbers include Dialogues: Christ and Mary Magdalene, Christ and sinners, Christ and mankind. The last of all is the most unusual. *The Plague at Milan*,



Marc-Antoine Charpentier's sacred mini-dramas are brought compellingly to life by Ensemble Correspondances

which dates from 1679, was written in honour of Cardinal Charles Borromeo, star of the Council of Trent and a character in Pfitzner's opera *Palestrina*. He is praised for the piety, humility and charity which led him to tend the sick during an outbreak of a 'horrenda pestis' in 1576. According to Thomas Leconte's booklet note, these exemplary characters all reflect the ideals and aspirations of the Counter-Reformation.

A splendid anthology; and what makes the set even more desirable is the so-called DVD bonus. The performance is not the same as on the CDs. Filmed in 2016 in the Chapelle Royale at Versailles, it consists of a dramatisation of two of the substantial *histoires sacrées* and four shorter pieces, one of which – the antiphon *In odorem unguentorum*, H51 – is not listed in the booklet. Aurélie Maestre's set design is simplicity itself: a rocky outcrop which can be split in two, a flight of steps, a tree. Vincent Huguet bases his production

around Mary Magdalene, Judith and Cecilia. During the viol-infused 'Night' interlude, Judith is dressed by her maid. As she lies on the bed with Holofernes, the camera focuses on their entwined hands; the maid, when describing the murder, holds the bag containing the severed head. But why, at the end, does Davy Cornillot's Ozias present Judith with a cloth of honour and then contemptuously veil her? Not surprisingly, she throws it in his face and storms off.

In *Caecilia*, Étienne Bazola's Valerian shows a distinct lack of enthusiasm when Cecilia insists on preserving her virginity, but they get married all the same. The chorus of believers celebrate the conversion of the two men with simple gesturing. In Part 2 Almachius physically attacks Cecilia while threatening her, a shocking moment. The last piece is another antiphon, *Sub tuum praesidium*, H28, for three voices unaccompanied, Cecilia holding Judith

and Mary Magdalene in a tender embrace. It's a sublime ending. Do not miss these wonderful performances. **G**

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



David Threasher hears Schumann from Christian Thielemann:

'In phrase after elegantly turned phrase, you hear how much this music means to Thielemann' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 44**



Jeremy Dibble on the latest Vaughan Williams from Andrew Manze:

'The detail of the Ninth's Scherzo, with its glittering array of percussion, harp and saxophones, is a revelation' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 47**

Alfvén

'Complete Symphonies, Vol 2'

Symphony No 3, Op 23. The Mountain King,

Op 37 – Suite. Uppsala Rhapsody, Op 24

Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin /

Łukasz Borowicz

CPO   CPO555 237-2 (65' • DDD)



As in its predecessor (6/18), there's more hard labour on display in this attractive

second volume of Łukasz Borowicz's cycle of Hugo Alfvén's symphonies. Like Sibelius's Second and Stenhammar's serenades, Alfvén's Third is a Nordic work written in Italy, 'an expression of the sunny happiness' that coursed through the composer as he worked on it near Sori in 1905. That happiness makes itself felt more in bustling activity than in thematic inspiration, but the bustle itself does well to obscure the lack of truly distinctive material. The best movement is the brooding, rising *Andante*. In the finale, machinery and efficiency are to the fore once more.

Stig Jacobsen's booklet claims for Alfvén the master orchestrator are fully justified by the composer's suite from *The Mountain King*, perhaps the most remarkable music here in terms of sound. We hear nature in all its moods, with filmic derring-do and mesmerising effects in the third movement, 'Summer Rain' (is that a saxophone solo I hear?). Once more, the sound of a classy Berlin orchestra makes all the difference to the imposition of the music.

After those evocations of nature, Alfvén's *Uppsala Rhapsody* is a paean to that other indispensable element of Nordic life: alcohol. Like Brahms's *Academic Festival Overture*, it clothes drinking songs in respectable garb, but Alfvén goes a little further with one or two comic touches he might have picked up from Richard Strauss. Well-behaved Alfvén might not be the distinctive

musical personality (and consistently rewarding discovery) of Kurt Atterberg but this is a charming, interesting and laudable series with some wonderful playing. **Andrew Mellor**

Azmeh

Azmeh The Fence, the Rooftop, and the Distant

Sea^a. Ibn Arabi Suite^b. Suite for Improvisor and

Orchestra^c Jabri Clarinet Concerto^d Roustom

Clarinet Concerto, 'Adrift on the Wine-Dark Sea'^d

Succari Suite, 'Paroles'^d

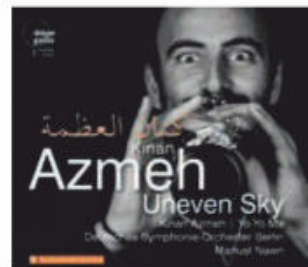
Kinan Azmeh *cl*^b Dima Orsho *voc*^a Yo-Yo Ma,

^aDavid Adorján *vc*^c Bodek Janke, 'Hogir Göregen

perc^{bcd} Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin /

Manuel Nawri

Dreyer Gaido     DGCD21114 (137' • DDD)



Damascus-born and New York-domiciled, Kinan Azmeh enjoys a

formidable reputation as a clarinetist and composer. Among his own works, *Suite for Improvisor and Orchestra* (2008) readily confirms his maxim that the best notated music sounds spontaneous whereas the best improvised music sounds structured; hence 'November 22nd', with its eloquent cantilena set against a sensuous backdrop. As does 'Recitation' from *Ibn Arabi Suite* (2013), with its agile dialogue between Azmeh and Dima Orsho, or 'Monologue' from *The Fence, the Rooftop, and the Distant Sea* (2016), with Azmeh and Yo-Yo Ma duetting in increasingly seamless accord.

Turning to the music by other composers and both concertos adumbrate powerful emotional responses. That by Kareem Roustom (2017) encounters turbulence and volatility prior to the security (real or imagined) of harbour, whereas that by Zaid Jabri (2004) unfolds in a more abstract while hardly less eventful framework prior to its climactic cadenza and calmer final phase with its sparely affecting postlude. *Paroles* (2006) by the late Dia Succari couches its intangible imagery within a more overtly

French idiom. Manuel Nawri secures a committed response throughout from the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester and Ara Guzelimian's notes provide a succinct basis for evaluating Syria's recent contribution to Western classical music.

Richard Whitehouse

JS Bach

Keyboard Concertos – BWV1052; BWV1055;

BWV1056; BWV1058; BWV1060; BWV1061;

BWV1062; BWV1063; BWV1064; BWV1065

Evgeni Koroliov, Anna Vinnitskaya, Ljupka Hadzi

Georgieva *pfs* Potsdam Chamber Academy

Alpha     ALPHA446 (144' • DDD)



It was only recently that the first complete edition of Bach's multiple

keyboard concertos played on modern instruments came our way, spearheaded by pianist David Fray (Erato, 2/19). My colleague Harriet Smith praised much of the playing, yet rightly disparaged the boomy and diffuse engineering. Alpha's present offering is markedly superior, and tosses in a few solo concertos to sweeten the deal. To be sure, Evgeni Koroliov and company cheat a little, because they play the Concerto with four keyboards, BWV1065, in an arrangement reduced down to three pianos. Not that it matters, because the music is basically Bach's reworking of Vivaldi's B minor Concerto with four violins: in other words, a transcription of a transcription.

At any rate, one has only to compare the generalised and blurry blend of the opening *Allegro* in the Fray/Rouvier C major Double Concerto alongside the altogether crisper, more incisive repartee between soloists Evgeni Koroliov and his former pupil Anna Vinnitskaya and the members of the Kammerakademie Potsdam to hear what I mean. Deftly adapted from Bach's famous Concerto for two violins, the C minor BWV1062's



The Potsdam Chamber Academy join Evgeni Koroliov and partners in thrilling accounts of Bach's multiple-keyboard concertos

outer movements feature sensitively dovetailed ensemble work from Koroliov and his wife Ljupka Hadzi Georgieva, while all three pianists raise the proverbial bar for technical and spiritual unanimity in the two triple concertos; indeed, BWV1064's central *Adagio* proves no less heart-melting than the vintage Fischer/Matthews/Smith three-piano encounter. In the finale of the D minor, BWV1063, Fray and his colleagues' largely *détaché* delineation imparts an effectively biting clarity between soloists and ensemble. By contrast, Koroliov and company bring a faster tempo and more varied articulations to the table.

One could argue that the solo concerto selections sound more arrestingly detailed in the finely honed Murray Perahia and Angela Hewitt cycles, yet Vinnitskaya's right- and left-hand independence and suave articulation throughout the finale of the A major Concerto, BWV1055, will take your breath away. As for Koroliov's D minor, he keeps the music vital and alive, shaping the phrases with a fluid sense of narrative and projection, not unlike the late Lukas Foss's unforgettable performances of this work.

Those who want all of Bach's multiple keyboard concertos on the piano cannot do better. Highly recommended. **Jed Distler**

Brian

Symphonies – No 7^a; No 16.

The Tinker's Wedding – Overture

by **Nikolai Savchenko** vs **New Russia State**

Symphony Orchestra / Alexander Walker

Naxos © 8 573959 (62' • DDD)



The inspiration behind Havergal Brian's Seventh Symphony

(completed in 1948 and, clocking in at nearly 40 minutes, the last of his big-scale efforts in the genre) grew out of a reading of Goethe's autobiography – and in particular his time in Strasbourg as a young law student ('... his love for the Cathedral and other loves. Life was full and exciting for him', to quote from a correspondence between the elderly composer and Calum MacDonald). Affirmative trumpet fanfares at once establish the mood for the opening *Allegro moderato*, after which the work acquires an increasingly perturbed demeanour, its emotional trajectory matching MacDonald's description that 'the symphony should perhaps be best understood – though in no crude programmatic way – as a tracing in

music of the progress of any human being from hot youth to wiser and sadder old age'.

Alexander Walker adopts a rather more urgent approach than did Charles Mackerras on his pioneering EMI version with the RLPO (4/88), without any loss in grip or intensity. Dating from the same year as the symphony, the comedy overture to *The Tinker's Wedding* makes a breezy curtain-raiser, and the disc concludes with the Sixteenth Symphony (1960), a single-span creation of considerable thematic resourcefulness and gritty individuality, rich in rewarding incident yet always underpinned by an enviable inexorability (there's no denying the formidable impact of its culmination).

Immensely spirited performances, one and all, from the hard-working New Russia State Symphony Orchestra under Walker's clear-headed lead, brightly engineered to boot – though, sonically speaking, no match for the realistic and detailed analogue production that graces Myer Fredman's vintage LPO account of No 16 for Lyrita (9/08). Astutely annotated by John Pickard, this bold Naxos release can be recommended to Brian acolytes and inquisitive collectors alike.

Andrew Achenbach

hyperion



While 'Kullervo' represents just the confident first step in Sibelius's symphonic odyssey, it is also a viscerally exciting experience on its own terms—and never more so than in this authoritative account from Thomas Dausgaard and his combined Scottish–Swedish forces.

CDA68248
Available Friday 28 June 2019

Sibelius: Kullervo

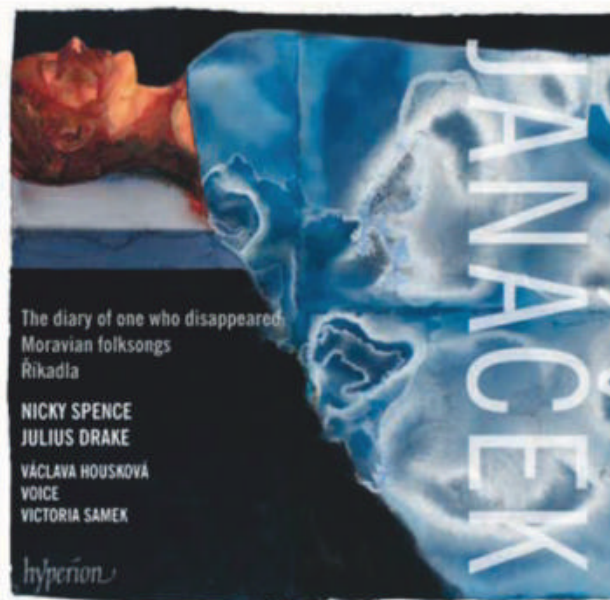
HELENA JUNTUNEN soprano, BENJAMIN APPL baritone, LUND MALE CHORUS
BBC SCOTTISH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA, THOMAS DAUSGAARD conductor

A song-cycle like no other, the 'Diary' is the perfect showcase for the glorious talents of Nicky Spence and friends.

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Janáček: The diary of one who disappeared & other works

NICKY SPENCE tenor
JULIUS DRAKE piano

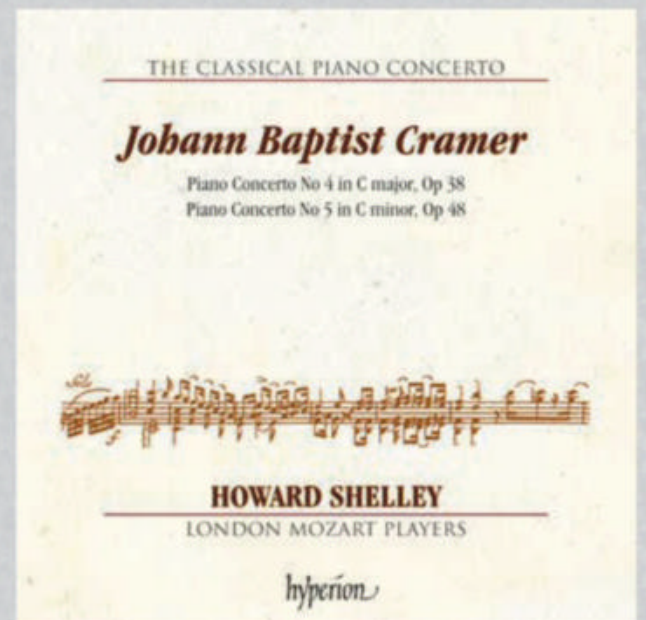


Typically fluent and expressive performances from Howard Shelley of music by a friend and contemporary of Beethoven.

CDA68270
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Cramer: Piano Concertos Nos 4 & 5

HOWARD SHELLEY piano
LONDON MOZART PLAYERS



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Machaut: A single rose The Orlando Consort
Pfitzner & Braunsfels: Piano Concertos Markus Becker, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Constantin Trinks



A second serving of Parry completes the Leonore Piano Trio's survey of some rewarding, if little known, English music.

CDA68276
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Chopin

Piano Concertos^a – No 1, Op 11; No 2, Op 21.
Nocturne No 20, Op *posth*

Charles Richard-Hamelin *pf*

^aMontreal Symphony Orchestra / Kent Nagano

Analekta © AN2 9146 (76' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Maison Symphonique,
Montreal, October 11, 12 & 14, 2018



In the wake of Charles Richard-Hamelin's second prize at the 2015 competition in

Warsaw, the Chopin Institute released an impressive two-disc set, demonstrating the breadth and depth of his interpretations of the Polish master. This new Analekta release affords us the pleasure of hearing Richard-Hamelin in both Chopin concertos with the expert collaboration of Kent Nagano and the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal, recorded live in concert last October.

Richard-Hamelin's overriding concern is the life of the phrase, achieved by replicating Chopin's expressive gestures through precise observance of every detail in the score. His playing never sounds routine or exhibitionistic. In his hands, Chopin's bravura passagework is imbued with meaning, its purpose the preparation or embellishment of a lyrical moment. High-flown *fioritura* seems informed by what a great singer could accomplish with the utmost taste and refinement. Unusually for a musician with Richard-Hamelin's focus on detail, his imaginative grasp of the larger musical architecture remains secure. Supported at every juncture by Nagano and the Montreal musicians, and beautifully captured by the Analekta engineers, these are Chopin concertos of extraordinary originality and distinction.

Both rondos suggest a festive celebration of the dance. Neither is especially fast, yet both describe movement with the grace and precision of an expert corps de ballet. The Romanze of the E minor Concerto speaks with delectable sweetness, poised and restrained, creating a genuine dialogue between soloist and orchestra. Liszt described the incomparable *Larghetto* of the F minor Concerto as 'of an ideal perfection, its feeling radiant and passionate by turn', in which 'joy is tempered and sorrow is sweetened'. Here it evokes an eloquence of the sort with which one imagines Talma and Bocage held Parisian audiences in thrall nearly 200 years ago.

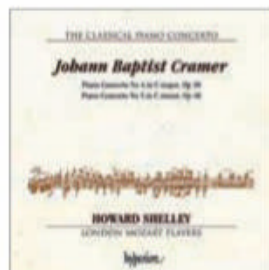
I would suggest that, even if you have a dozen recordings of the Chopin concertos on your shelf, you won't regret adding this one. **Patrick Rucker**

Cramer

Piano Concertos – No 4, Op 38; No 5, Op 48

London Mozart Players / Howard Shelley *pf*

Hyperion © CDA68270 (61' • DDD)



Howard Shelley and the London Mozart Players are no strangers to Johann

Baptist Cramer, having recorded the Mannheim-born, London-raised composer/pianist/entrepreneur's Second, Seventh and Eighth Piano Concertos for Chandos in 2002. Sixteen years later they reconvened to set down Cramer's Fourth and Fifth Concertos for Hyperion's Classical Piano Concerto series. Stanley Sadie likened Nos 2, 7 and 8 to 'less fiery, less purposeful and more decorative manifestations of early Beethoven', and these words readily apply to the works in hand. Yet Cramer's piano writing in and of itself is ingenuous, idiomatic and alive, and almost always holds your attention. Like Beethoven, Cramer was fond of *subito* dynamics, those sudden shifts from soft to loud or loud to soft that momentarily take the listener by surprise, along with unpredictable placement of accents. Listen, for example, to the dramatic build-up and lyrical coming-down from the scales in the transition into the second theme in the Fourth Concerto's Rondo. In the Fifth Concerto's first-movement recapitulation, also notice the darting syncopations in the piano part's busy passagework in dialogue with the strings.

It takes a special kind of pianist to make certain pieces sound better or more important than they actually are, and Shelley certainly knows how to sell Cramer. His inflections of phrase convey palpable tension and release, while long, sustained *cantabiles* unfold with vocally orientated modulation. Both as soloist and conductor, Shelley pays special attention to the timing and articulation of embellishments, ornaments and roulades, as borne out in the Fifth Concerto's zesty main theme, plus the brass and timpani's cutting brilliance. Jeremy Dibble's superb and musically detailed annotations are most welcome, and so are Hyperion's well-balanced, judiciously resonant sound.

Jed Distler

d'Indy

Karadec Suite, Op 34. Médée, Op 47.

Saugefleurie, Op 21

Malmö Symphony Orchestra / Darrell Ang

Naxos © 8 573858 (53' • DDD)



Rarely heard in the concert hall, d'Indy's characterful and richly scored music

is heavily reliant on recordings for its continued exposure. All three works on this release have been recorded previously, most recently as part of a series of the composer's orchestral output by Rumon Gamba and the Iceland Symphony Orchestra for Chandos. *Saugefleurie* is the earliest piece here, a symphonic poem from 1884 suffused with the influence of Wagner, d'Indy having become an ardent enthusiast for the German master's music after attending the first performance of the *Ring* cycle at Bayreuth in 1876. The music of *Siegfried* in particular is a key influence at a number of points, but the work's luminous scoring and sense of purpose makes for an engaging listen and the serene conclusion is deeply felt.

By contrast, the *Karadec Suite*, extracted from the incidental music d'Indy wrote in 1890 for a play, draws on Breton folk melodies for its inspiration. The three items that comprise the suite amount to less than 10 minutes of music but each is distinctive and strongly communicative. More substantial is *Médée*, a five-movement suite derived from d'Indy's 1898 music for the play by the French poet and dramatist Catulle Mendès. In addition to the folk melodies found in the second movement, echoes of Act 2 of *Parsifal* can be heard in the first and last movements and there is more than a hint of Tchaikovsky in the fourth. Nevertheless, d'Indy manages to unite these disparate influences into an attractive score, the shimmering, Impressionistic opening and closing stages of the third movement being particularly memorable. The playing of the Malmö Symphony Orchestra under Darrell Ang is vividly expressive and the recording is first-class.

Christian Hoskins

Saugefleurie, Médée – selected comparison:

Iceland SO, *Gamba* (6/13) (CHAN) CHAN10760

Langgaard • Lassen • P Scharwenka

'The Romantic Violin Concerto, Vol 22'

Langgaard Violin Concerto

Lassen Violin Concerto, Op 87

P Scharwenka Violin Concerto, Op 95

Linus Roth *vn* BBC Scottish Symphony

Orchestra / Antony Hermus

Hyperion © CDA68268 (77' • DDD)



There is always the exciting prospect, when presented with a disc of an unknown

work by some neglected composer, of a new friend – a work that you will want to cherish and return to often. Sadly, Eduard Lassen's 1888 Concerto is not one of them. This may simply be a matter of personal taste but I found little to enjoy in its procession of unmemorable, wishy-washy themes, its amorphous first movement and, I'm sorry to say, the thin, unvaried tone and dynamics of the soloist. Once the orchestral exposition ends, the opening *Allegro* movement (13'21") has not one single *tutti* until the final bars, the violin offering a meandering diddle-diddle-diddle sequence that I couldn't wait to end. The slow movement opens rather beautifully before declining to go anywhere in particular, and around the 6'20" mark there is a section that, if I didn't know Andrew Keener was in the producer's chair, I could have sworn suffered from poor intonation. The finale picks up a little but not sufficiently to rescue the work.

Far better is the 1894 concerto by (Ludwig) Philipp Scharwenka, the elder and lesser-known brother of Xaver (the composer of four sublime piano concertos in Hyperion's Romantic Piano Concerto series). Here, at least, is some stronger material and a greater sense of purpose from Linus Roth. Indeed, in the beguiling slow movement he soars most affectingly above the stave and makes the most of the delightful finale, a movement that I can see becoming popular in its own right and being played independently on those classical radio stations that permit such things.

The final item is the slight, short (9'35") single-movement Concerto by Rued Langgaard, which, though written in 1942, speaks in the same lyrical, tuneful and tonal language as the other two works, having the additional interest of a prominent piano part. With Roth at his most sweetly persuasive and the BBC Scottish SO offering incisive, idiomatic accompaniment under Antony Hermus, this might just be enough to tip the balance in favour of one of Hyperion's less compelling releases.

Jeremy Nicholas

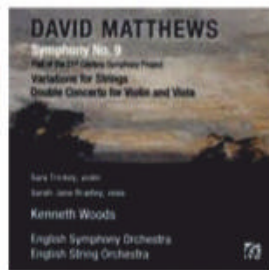
D Matthews

Symphony No 9^a. Double Concerto^b.

Variations for Strings^c

^bSara Trickey *vn* ^bSarah-Jane Bradley *va* ^{bc}English String Orchestra; ^aEnglish Symphony Orchestra / Kenneth Woods

Nimbus Alliance (F) NI6382 (64' • DDD)



Pretty much every major symphonist from Brahms to Maxwell Davies leaves

a trace on the Ninth Symphony of David Matthews. The inference drawn, however, need not be of a synthetic assimilation. Some would say the symphony is now a musical outfitters of dead men's clothes. Matthews contends otherwise in a cycle that has steadily gathered momentum and purpose during the past decade to culminate (for now) in a cogent five-movement structure.

In fact, it's Haydn who comes to mind – no small compliment – in the initial unfolding of a modest carol melody and its unexpected capacity for symphonic heavy lifting. A motivic fragment of the melody then forms the basis of both a pounding, ostinato scherzo and its slower central episode (in four, not a trio), and it doesn't require perusal of the score to hear the kinship of the carol with a briefer fourth-movement waltz, more pastorally scored but shadowed in the manner of Max (or Hardy or the *Eclogues* of Virgil for that matter) by a looming threat to the idyll. Fading out inconclusively over Sibelian pizzicato strings, the conflict is fought afresh and won by a good old-fashioned finale over which the carol melody comes to ring out in a C major happy ending.

That leaves the central slow movement – and indeed the six-minute elegy at the heart of the Ninth doesn't bear the weight of expectation upon such a structural fulcrum. Echoes of birdsong, of Vaughan Williams and Lutosławski, draw the piece away from the goal of renewal which is the theme of the carol, the symphony and perhaps of Matthews's symphonic career.

The Ninth Symphony received its first performance at the hands of these performers last year, and at the same time they made this admirable albeit slightly congested recording in St George's, Bristol. There is more space to the engineering and more finesse to the execution of the two string-orchestra pieces recorded at Great Malvern Priory.

Dating from 1986, a set of eight variations on a troubled Bach chorale deserves a place in the canon of celebrated English string literature from Purcell through to Elgar, Bridge and Tippett. Birdsong returns in the Double Concerto of 2013, which celebrates friendship rather

than competition without attaining the sureness of purpose or distinctive profile of its companion works, for all the delicacy and sympathy of the partnership between Sara Trickey and Sarah-Jane Bradley.

Peter Quantrill

Mendelssohn

'Mendelssohn in Birmingham, Vol 5'

Athalie, Op 74 – Overture. Meeresstille und

glückliche Fahrt, Op 27^a. The Hebrides, Op 26^b.

A Midsummer Night's Dream – Overture, Op 21^c.

Ruy Blas, Op 95^d. St Paul, Op 36 – Overture.

Die schöne Melusine, Op 32. Trumpet Overture, Op 101

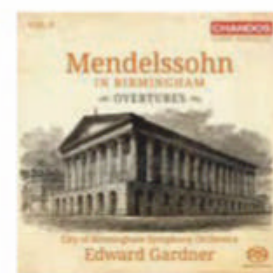
City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra /

Edward Gardner

Chandos (F) CHSA5235 (75' • DDD/DSD)

From ^bCHSA5132 (2/14), ^dCHSA5139 (10/14),

^aCHSA5151 (4/15), ^cCHSA5161 (2/16)



This engaging disc of Mendelssohn's overtures forms the final volume of

Edward Gardner and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra's survey of the composer's major orchestral works. It's carefully programmed to place the familiar alongside the less well known, the rarities, in this instance, including the early *Trumpet Overture*, composed in 1826 just before *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (the late opus number is deceptive), the Overture to *St Paul*, seldom heard away from an oratorio that is itself performed infrequently, and the once popular *Athalie*, which nowadays we don't perhaps hear as often as we might.

The performances, as one might expect, are for the most part exemplary. Gardner is often keenly alert to both the emotional tone and innovations in sonority and structure of each work. *Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt* is particularly fine, as the immovable D major harmonies and shifting string chords at the start gradually give way to a buoyant *allegro* that tingles with excitement. There's plenty of drama between the seductive water spirit and her blustering human lover in *Die schöne Melusine*. *St Paul*, its thematic material based on the Lutheran choral 'Wachet auf', sounds noble and fervent without ever tipping into sanctimony, while *The Hebrides*, propelled forwards with understated urgency, is as atmospheric and haunting as one would wish. Only in *Athalie*, perhaps, does the tone briefly falter as Gardner, seeking to avoid bombast, one suspects, plays down the genuine majesty of the opening. That the ceremonial *Trumpet*



Jean-Efflam Bavouzet, supported by the Manchester Camerata and Gábor Takács-Nagy, brings highly individual personality to Mozart's most popular concertos

Overture sounds a bit stiff is Mendelssohn's responsibility, not his.

The CBSO, meanwhile, are superbly responsive throughout, playing with a combination of great brio and scrupulous attention to detail. The woodwind sound particularly lovely at the start of *Melusine* and the unwinding flute solo at the centre of *Meeresstille*, heralding movement after becalmed stillness, is most beautifully done. *Ruy Blas* crackles with energy, while *A Midsummer Night's Dream* genuinely beguiles with its filigree textures and hints of slightly sinister magic, though I prefer the fractionally greater lightness of Iván Fischer here, in his Budapest Festival Orchestra performance of most of the incidental music (Channel Classics, 8/18). The Chandos recording is warm, spacious and carefully balanced. It's an excellent conclusion to a very fine series.

Tim Ashley

Mozart

'Piano Concertos, Vol 4'

Piano Concertos^a - No 20, K466; No 21, K467.

Don Giovanni - Overture

^aJean-Efflam Bavouzet *pf*

Manchester Camerata / Gábor Takács-Nagy

Chandos © CHAN20083 (65' • DDD)



These miraculous works from the Lenten season of 1785 may be the two Mozart concertos most commonly paired on disc. Listeners who have heard and enjoyed the previous three volumes in this series (11/16, 10/17, 12/18), however, might have come to expect something a little special from these musicians. They won't be disappointed, either.

Concertos Nos 20 and 21 represent the ultimate synthesis in Mozart's mature style, with peaks of technique, inspiration and creative personality conspiring to create works of unprecedented individuality and expressive depth. They form an ideal pair, contrasting the majesty of trumpet-laden C major with the anguished *Sturm und Drang* of dark D minor. The playfulness of No 21's outer movements encloses one of Mozart's most sublime creations – the inimitable slow movement that once linked the work with a Swedish B-movie. Bavouzet and the Manchester Camerata are ideally poised in the fast music, with the conversational interplay between piano and

woodwinds displaying the naturalness that is an evident hallmark of this cycle. In performance the *Andante* is often either dragged out and overburdened with an ersatz 'expression' that it can't bear, or trotted through in an effort to avoid doing just that. Here, Gábor Takács-Nagy sets the ideal tempo – a touch slower than Zacharias for Jan Lisiecki (DG, 9/12) and faster than Marriner for Yeol Eum Son (Onyx, 6/18), to take two recent-ish recordings – while Bavouzet doesn't so much sing the *cantabile* melody as croon it, delaying the down-beats like a nightclub singer and ornamenting liberally. It's a highly personal take on this all-too-familiar piece, to be sure, and I love it.

The *Don Giovanni* Overture makes you catch your breath as it bursts in after the effervescent close of K467, making the Camerata sound like a far bigger band than their numbers suggest. The ground is thus prepared for the D minor of K466, played with the same acuity and charisma as the C major Concerto, even if the central Romance is sung straighter, without the lubricious liberties of the C major's *Andante*.

This series of discs is shaping up to be a serious front-runner in a cycle of works that has never wanted for fine recordings.

Cadenzas are by Beethoven (K466) and, less predictably, Friedrich Gulda (K467). For this concerto pairing, there are few recordings as fine. **David Threasher**

Nagovitsyn • S Slonimsky • Uspensky

'Leningrad Violin Concertos'

Nagovitsyn Violin Concerto^a

S Slonimsky Concerto primaverile^b

Uspensky Phantasmagoria^c

^cArkady Gutnikov, ^bSergey Stadler, ^aMaxim

Vengerov, ^aMarina Yashvili *vns* Leningrad

Philharmonic Orchestra / ^aAlexander Dmitriev,

^bVladimir Ponkin, ^aGintaras Rinkevicius

Northern Flowers © NF/PMA99128 (72' • DDD)

Recorded ^alive at the Philharmonic Grand Hall, Leningrad (St Petersburg), ^aSeptember 6, 1983;

^b1986; ^cApril 15, 1989



Northern Flowers continues to unearth much of interest out of the Soviet musical

archives. This latest release features three concertos by composers (too?) little known in the West.

Most substantial here is the Violin Concerto (1969) by Vyacheslav Nagovitsyn (*b*1939). The influence of his teacher Shostakovich may be evident in the opening Sinfonia – its fractious progress thrown into relief by the introspection from which it emerges then returns – but the hypnotic Ostinato and sardonic Finale hint at more individual expression. Sergey Slonimsky (*b*1932) has gained wider acclaim; and while his freewheeling stylistic approach often verges on the meretricious, *Concerto primaverile* (1983) is never less than diverting, the Baroque vigour of its outer movements framing a Romanza of unforced eloquence. If *Phantasmagoria* (1988) by Vladislav Uspensky (1937–2004) impresses more by its technical brilliance than musical substance, its cohesive progress from uneasy stasis to ethereal evanescence feels undeniable.

Equally certain is the soloists' focus (not least a 14-year-old Maxim Vengerov) in conveying the qualities of each piece. Decent sound, with booklet notes awash in Soviet-era hyperbole. **Richard Whitehouse**

Piazzolla • Vivaldi • Molinelli

'Tango Seasons'

Molinelli Estate Reloaded^a **Piazzolla** Las cuatro estaciones porteñas (arr Molinelli)^a

Vivaldi The Four Seasons

Andrés Gabetta *vn* ^a**Mario Stefano Pietrodarchi** *bandoneón* **Cappella Gabetta**

Sony Classical © 19075 92549-2 (67' • DDD)



Piazzolla on Baroque period instruments? I was somewhat sceptical before

slipping the CD into the player, but my doubts were quickly swept away by these swaggering, gritty accounts of the tanguero's *Four Seasons in Buenos Aires*. Indeed, the strings' bite and slightly edgy tone sounds stylistically apposite. I also find Roberto Molinelli's well-wrought and respectful arrangements preferable to the interventionist recompositions of Leonid Desyatnikov recorded by Kremer (Nonesuch, 5/00) and others. Molinelli adds subtle polyphonic detail to bolster rhythmic momentum, and even the few neo-Baroque touches – like the brief harpsichord solo he interpolates near the beginning of 'Winter' – give off a faint whiff of psychedelia that's not out of place in these works from the late '60s.

Mario Stefano Pietrodarchi's bandoneón serves as an anchor for the ensemble and his solos are arrestingly expressive – listen, say, to how he makes his instrument weep at 1'17" in 'Autumn'. But the spotlight is firmly trained on Andrés Gabetta, and the Argentinian violinist really digs in, playing with a fearlessness that was a hallmark of Piazzolla's own interpretative style. His Vivaldi is equally incendiary; and while we're fairly inundated with high-octane, period-instrument recordings of these Op 8 concertos, Gabetta's still feels vital. He favours very fast tempos in the outer movements, but as they have the feeling of one-to-a-bar, they don't feel at all rushed. He can also be extremely free with the tempo, often going to extremes in order to bring the music's imagery to life, as he does in the drunken celebration of the opening *Allegro* of 'Autumn'. What's most remarkable, perhaps, is how fresh and spontaneous everything sounds: these may be studio recordings but they convey the frisson of a live performance. Mention must be made, too, of the excellence of the Cappella Gabetta, who follow their leader every step of the way, as well as of the marvellous physicality of the recorded sound.

Estate Reloaded, Molinelli's rewrite of the final movement of Vivaldi's 'Summer' in the *tango nuevo* style (with a snippet or two of Piazzolla snuck in), is a clever and satisfying encore.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Saariaho

Ciel d'hiver. *Trans*^a. *True Fire*^b

^bGerald Finley *bass-bar* ^aXavier de Maistre *hp*

Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra / Hannu Lintu

Online © ODE1309-2 (61' • DDD • T)

^bRecorded live at the Helsinki Music Centre, November 2017



One concerto, one song-cycle, one refashioned slice of an orchestral work

from Kaija Saariaho and another case of the composer's magical spectral spells proving insufficient to mask the lack of materialistic depth at the heart of much of her recent work.

Still, Saariaho has always understood the voice and allowed her music to hang on the Velcro of words. As such it's Gerald Finley's wondrous delivery of a restrained but soulful vocal line that makes the song-cycle *True Fire* (2014). The booklet goes big on the composer's intense reaction to non-musical stimuli but the work was well under way before Saariaho sought out texts she could graft on to it, discovering later that they unified perfectly with one another and the music. That's handy.

It's a dichotomy because where the vocal line is focused, the orchestral writing would be nothing without its surface effects. There is not the tension of some Nordic song-cycles of the past decade and whenever a device emerges underneath it is short-lived and impulsive. You could make similar claims for the harp concerto *Trans* (2015), where – predictably enough – gestures from the solo instrument are almost invariably met with reactionary shards of orchestral activity that become repetitive. Saariaho was fascinated by the instrument but her gestural language is relatively small, favouring downward glissandos and cyclic finger-picking which Xavier de Maistre offers up with appropriately misty eyes.

The dark corners of the second movement's ('Vanité') orchestral hinterland take us to a more interesting place and are nicely set up by the disc's filler: *Ciel d'hiver*, a downsized version of the central movement of Saariaho's *Orion* (2002) which is patiently, broodingly and richly played by Lintu and the FRSO. This was the composer in good vintage delivering a chilling, slab-like crescendo with a clear focal point, features that happily coexist alongside her mesmeric exploration of colour. Those were the days. **Andrew Mellor**

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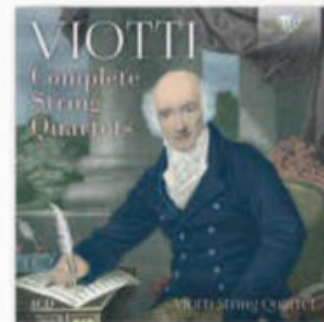


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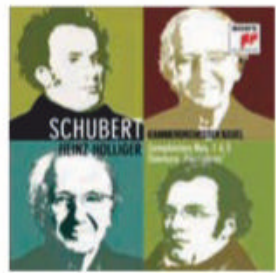
Schubert

Symphonies – No 1, D82; No 5, D485.

Fierrabras – Overture

Basel Chamber Orchestra / Heinz Holliger

Sony Classical © 19075 81440-2 (67' • DDD)



Having impressed earlier this year with a great *Great C* major (2/19), Heinz

Holliger and his Swiss chamber players go back to the beginning with a disc pairing the First Symphony with the evergreen Fifth. The First has not lacked for recent recordings but this is perhaps the finest of them all, enhanced by a particular care for sonority and the clean lines afforded by a small, select band of soloists playing with reduced vibrato. There's Holliger's characteristic attention to woodwind sound – the recording provides a notably wind-orientated focus – and an uncommonly acute ear for phrasing, as witness, for example, the string 'stings' as the first movement's development section gets under way (6'20").

The *Andante* is kept moving – somewhere in between the tempo of René Jacobs's jog-trot and Rémy Ballot's gentle meander – while the Minuet is brisker even than Jacobs's. The finale moves along playfully but never sounds harried, which was a flaw in the B'Rock reading. The Fifth Symphony is similarly finely judged and one is once again aware of the particular care that has clearly been lavished upon it, without its ever sounding mannered or manicured.

In all, it appears that of the recently established Schubert symphony cycles, this might be one to look out for. If further enticement to investigate were required, then a curtain-raiser in the form of a particularly luring and intense Overture to the ill-fated opera *Fierrabras* only adds to the allure. It feels rather as if 2019 is turning into a vintage year for Schubert recordings. Lucky old Schubert – and lucky us!

David Thresher

Symphony No 1 – selected comparisons:

Klangkollektiv Wien, Ballot (2/19) (GRAM) 99180

B'Rock Orch, Jacobs (2/19) (PENT) PTC5186 707

Schumann

Complete Symphonies

Staatskapelle Dresden / Christian Thielemann

Sony Classical © (two discs for the price of one) 19075 94341-2 (141' • DDD)

Recorded live at Suntory Hall, Tokyo, October 31 & November 1, 2018

Schumann • Schubert

Schumann Symphony No 1, 'Spring', Op 38^a

Schubert Symphony No 3, D200^b

Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra /

Mariss Jansons

BR-Klassik © 900176 (58' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Herkulesaal, Munich,

^bJanuary 26-30, 2015; ^aMarch 21 & 22, 2018



Christian Thielemann's 60th birthday present to himself is a set of the four Schumann symphonies, which he toured with the Staatskapelle Dresden in the Far East last year and recorded in concert in Tokyo. If the recent trend in this music has been to perform it with smaller orchestras to sidestep perceived problems with Schumann's orchestration, then Thielemann's approach might be thought somewhat to turn the clock back. These performances are sumptuous rather than sinewy and perhaps a touch more indulgent than has become the fashion.

Tempos are generally a notch (or three) down on those chosen by recent contenders – among them Dausgaard, Nézet-Séguin and Ticciati, all with chamber orchestras – but the associated gain comes in the sheen of the Staatskapelle's strings and the boldness of its brass. Woodwind come and go, being less focused, for example, in the *Rhenish* than in the Fourth (played in the published, revised version, rather than the slimmer original version preferred by Brahms). It's a gentle cruise down the Rhine, too – the Scherzo (admittedly *sehr mässig* rather than *lebhaft*) gliding in almost two minutes later than, say, Dausgaard's paddle steamer. But, in phrase after elegantly turned phrase, you hear how much this music means to Thielemann; the affection is palpable to a more discernable degree than in his previous recording, with the Philharmonia (DG, 1/98, 1/00, 1/02). That means marked pullings-up into second subjects and changes of texture, and doesn't always necessarily work: the finale of the *Rhenish*, for example, can't sustain the lightness with which it opens, becoming dogged as it proceeds. A shame, because the preceding Cologne Cathedral movement rises in full majesty, but audibly from Wagner's Rhine rather than the river as, say, Beethoven might have known it.

The Fourth's opening *Lebhaft* perhaps understandably doesn't turn on a sixpence

like the athletic Gardiner or the chamber versions mentioned above; nor does it seem to settle comfortably into its pulse. But the symphony proceeds with leisure through the central movements before working up to a suitably exciting peroration in the finale. The best performance is perhaps the Second, elegantly phrased throughout, progressing from a tautly wound opening movement and Scherzo, via a rapturously sustained *Adagio espressivo*, to a jubilant peroration.

Back in Germany, Mariss Jansons too offers 'big band' Schumann, in a performance of the *Spring* that demonstrates that a long-established symphony orchestra can take on the new boys and girls. Thielemann's *Spring* is fairly springy but Jansons's sap is clearly rising; Thielemann would seem to be breathing a slightly more hazy air. There's a great deal of subtlety, too, in the phrase-shaping, with woodwind especially exhibiting bags of character and freedom. Jansons couples the *Spring* with Schubert's Third Symphony, full of perky charm and with a finale that ticks and purrs like a sedan from the city's Motor Works.

Both sets have the odd vicissitudes of concert recordings: occasional moments of just the merest ensemble indecision and, on Janson's set, some audible encouragement from the podium. Nevertheless, audience noise is notable by its absence during the music (Thielemann's set is shorn of concluding applause; Jansons's is not) and both boast finely recorded sound. Those in search of slimline Schumann will likely eschew the Dresden option in favour of the alternative cycles named above – but don't discount Jansons's lithe, athletic way with the *Spring*. **David Thresher**

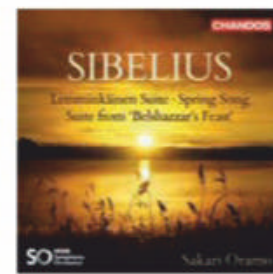
Sibelius

Lemminkäinen Suite, Op 22. Spring Song, Op 16.

Belshazzar's Feast, Op 51 – Suite

BBC Symphony Orchestra / Sakari Oramo

Chandos © CHAN20136 (72' • DDD)



Sakari Oramo has recorded precious little Sibelius since his time in Birmingham but don't think the repertoire on this disc constitutes anything less than a mighty statement. We have Sibelius in three different but vital modes – linguistic cornerstones, even – on which the BBC Symphony's chief conductor brings deep insights to bear.



Magical aura: Sakari Oramo and the BBC Symphony Orchestra offer outstanding Sibelius

The first movement of the *Lemminkäinen Suite* is a remarkable structure that consistently puts me in mind of the new roof covering the concourse area at King's Cross station in London: from a single source, a huge structure sprouts outwards to its double apex. Successful performances, at their most basic, enliven this fine tapestry's copious details without letting them trespass on the line or disturb the layering. Oramo's builds towards Lemminkäinen's climactic encounter with Kyllikki with excellent strain and momentum, which in turn points up the exhausted repose that follows, even if some of the early stages of the build-up champ dangerously at the bit.

'The Swan of Tuonela' is placed third – often an argument for more symphonic than narrative appreciation – and the depth of the performance in this movement is telling. Oramo probes the striking orchestration at the end of that movement while, similarly, the closing bars of 'Lemminkäinen in Tuonela' have a magical aura (Susan Monks's cello-playing here is special). 'Lemminkäinen's Return' – the work's full-circle dash back to E flat major – has a Karelian bounce that few have matched and the orchestra, yet again,

is sonorous but tight as a nut. Having just chosen my preferred recording of the suite for BBC Radio 3's *Building a Library* (Paavo Järvi), there is no doubting this would have been a serious contender and at the very least an 'also recommended'.

Control of detail is so important in Sibelius because it gives oxygen to those things that emerge from between the layers – both abstract and thematically real. It is thrilling to hear the rarity *Spring Song* played with full acknowledgement that this is rather more than a seasonal ditty; rather, a piece rooted in folklore and mystery that carries feelings of sensuality and awakening inside its Lutheran chassis. Oramo's emphasis on cross-rhythms even argues the case for the 'Oriental Dance' from *Belshazzar's Feast* as something rather more than a piece of fashion-conscious kitsch. In the extreme space, patience and distilled evocation (not to mention excellent solo work) of the rest of the suite we once again come close to the heart of Sibelius in an unlikely place. **Andrew Mellor**

Suk

Asrael, Op 27. *Fairy Tale (Pohádka)*, Op 16
Czech Philharmonic Orchestra / Jiří Bělohlávek
 Decca (two discs for the price of one)
 483 4781DH2 (88' • DDD)



How gratifying that Jiří Bělohlávek was able to re-record Suk's *Asrael* in his

second tenure at the helm of the Czech Philharmonic. His first version had no lack of eloquence or fervour, but also a tendency to hold back during climactic passages; something later redressed in his live reading with the BBC Symphony, with its passing flaws in ensemble and vagaries of balance.

Neither of these is an issue here, as witness a first movement that emerges purposefully from its sombre introduction into an *allegro* of trenchant resolve, maintained throughout an impulsive development and culminating in an anguished apotheosis. The Intermezzo wears its Mahlerian overtones discreetly, not least that mesmeric passage where the funeral-march theme dissolves into overlapping pizzicatos, while the Scherzo compensates for an initial (and marginal) lack of impetus with its raptly expressive Trio then coursing surge towards an implacable close. Nor is the slow movement unduly over-weighted –

so enabling its episodes of bittersweet evocation to register as fully as the wearied resignation into which it subsides. The finale duly caps this performance with a visceral onward drive (as in the central fugato) that leads inexorably to a powerful culmination, then an epilogue whose relative expanse is justified through its arrival at a benediction the more enduring for having been so methodically and affectingly achieved.

Bělohlávek's association with *Fairy Tale* goes back even further. He recorded it with the Prague Symphony near the outset of his career (8/80), while his second account had a greater sophistication but less character. This new version brings an inspired synthesis with its ravishing love music (Jiří Vodička's violin solos effortless in their pathos), succeeded by a playful Intermezzo and plangent Funeral Music, then the finale strives heroically toward its ultimate transcendence.

The Czech Philharmonic give their collective all; with the best sound Decca has yet achieved at the Rudolfinum, this can be placed next to Charles Mackerras as the finest modern *Asrael*. If these are indeed Bělohlávek's last studio recordings, a plea for the commercial release of the Barbican performance of Dvořák's Requiem, which was also his final concert appearance. **Richard Whitehouse**

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Czech PO, Bělohlávek (5/92) (CHAN) CHAN9640

Asrael – selected comparisons:

Czech PO, Mackerras (6/11) (SUPR) SU4043-2

BBCSO, Bělohlávek (10/12) (SUPR) SU4095-2

Szymanowski · Zemlinsky

Szymanowski Violin Concerto No 1, Op 35^a

Zemlinsky Lyric Symphony, Op 18^b

^bJohanna Winkel *sop* ^bMichael Nagy *bar*

^aElina Vähälä *vn* **Polish National Radio**

Symphony Orchestra / Alexander Liebreich

Accentus Music © ACC30470 (67' • DDD)



This is a very attractive pairing of two early 20th-century

works distinguished by the opulence of their orchestral textures. Szymanowski's First Violin Concerto, completed in 1916 but not premiered until 1922, has been successfully recorded by many violinists, including Danczowska, Zehetmair, Zimmermann and Little. Even with this competition, however, Elina Vähälä's version stands out for its quality. Her performance has an expressive intensity that contrasts with both the quicksilver delicacy

of Zehetmair's approach and the warmth and fantasy of Little's performance. This isn't to suggest Vähälä's interpretation lacks liveness or spontaneity, for these qualities are present too, alongside an impressive technical command and a sense of rapture at key moments. The contribution of the Polish orchestra under Alexander Liebreich is as refined and impassioned as any rival.

Zemlinsky's *Lyric Symphony*, completed in 1923 and based on poems by the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore, reflects the influence of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* but is otherwise significantly different in style. As with the Szymanowski concerto, there are a number of excellent recordings already available, notably those by Chailly and Eschenbach. This new performance can be considered at least their equal. Although the singers are forwardly balanced, the recording is of surpassing transparency and richness, allowing Zemlinsky's iridescent score to be heard to ravishing effect, and Liebreich conveys the music's mingled ardour, otherworldliness and heartbreak with tremendous conviction. Michael Nagy doesn't offer the honeyed warmth of Matthias Goerne for Eschenbach in the four baritone songs, but contributes a performance of great sensitivity and has the vocal heft to deal with the part's more challenging moments. Johanna Winkel's account of the three soprano songs is both ravishing and deeply musical, illuminating the text even more persuasively than Christine Schäfer does on the Capriccio recording. Despite a booklet note extending to 60 pages, no text or translations are included, which is regrettable (although the omission can be remedied with a quick online search.) That aside, this is a very recommendable offering. **Christian Hoskins**

Szymanowski – selected comparisons:

Zehetmair, CBSO, Rattle

(8/96) (EMI/WARN) ➔ 555607-2 or 557777-2

Little, BBC SO, Gardner (10/17) (CHAN) CHSA5185

Zemlinsky – selected comparisons:

RCO, Chailly (12/94^R) (DECC) 478 8347DTC

Orch de Paris, Eschenbach (7/06) (CAPR) 71 081

Tavener · Khan

Khan The Song of Separation and Waiting^a

Tavener Mother and Child^b. The Protecting Veil^b

^aSukhvinder 'Pinky' Singh *tabla*

^bSinfonietta Riga / ^{ab}Matthew Barley *vc*

Signum © SIGCD585 (68' • DDD)



This disc begins with a beautiful reading by Olwyn Fouéré of Yeats's heartbreaking

'The Cloths of Heaven', a poem Tavener set as part of his remarkable and rarely performed song-cycle *To a Child Dancing in the Wind* (1983), and then suddenly we are in the breathtaking rhapsody that is *The Protecting Veil*. Matthew Barley has gone to considerable trouble to construct this programme, centred on his own magnificent performance of a work whose premiere at the 1989 Proms brought Tavener back to worldwide fame, and it is an approach that brings ample rewards.

Remarkably, Barley directs the Sinfonietta Riga himself, from the cello, and the sense of complicity is very much a hallmark of this performance. When I first saw the score of this work, when the composer showed it to me in 1988, worrying that it was 'too romantic', I could never have imagined that it would be possible to arrive at a performance of comparable intimacy, so grand did its gestures seem. But Barley has absolutely understood that intimacy is what underlies this piece: it is certainly on a large scale but it is also a kind of personal dialogue between the composer and the life of the Mother of God. Barley's cello sings and the orchestra functions perfectly as the 'cosmic echo chamber' the composer desired.

After another reading by Fouéré, of Yeats's 'The Mother of God', an arrangement by Barley (including some improvised solo cello music) of Tavener's *Mother and Child* is heard, which I have come to prefer to the original version for choir, organ and gong. A poem by Fritjof Schuon, whose work meant so much to Tavener later in his life, follows, read by Julie Christie, and the disc closes with Barley's arrangement for cello and tabla of a work by Sultan Khan, an appropriate acknowledgement of Tavener's lifelong interest in the music of India.

Even if you have other recordings of *The Protecting Veil*, I recommend this utterly beautiful and originally framed version unreservedly. **Ivan Moody**

Tchaikovsky

'Tchaikovsky Treasures'

Violin Concerto, Op 35. Eugene Onegin -

Lensky's Aria; Letter Scene (arr Braunstein).

Sérénade mélancolique, Op 26. Swan Lake - Pas

de deux (arr Braunstein). Valse scherzo, Op 34

Guy Braunstein *vn*

BBC Symphony Orchestra / Kirill Karabits

Pentatone © PTC5186 747 (70' • DDD/DSD)



'Why compose violin and orchestra rhapsodies after Tchaikovsky's opera

and ballet music?’ asks Guy Braunstein in his booklet note to this disc, entitled ‘Tchaikovsky Treasures’. It’s a good question and one that puzzles me. The former concertmaster of the Berlin Philharmonic explains that it was while conducting *Eugene Onegin* that he took out his violin and started playing the vocal line of Tatyana’s Letter Scene, gradually modifying it ‘for virtuoso violin’. He argues that Leopold Auer did just the same with Tchaikovsky’s music.

So Braunstein’s disc, which opens with the Violin Concerto, is bulked out with his own arrangements of the Letter Scene, Lensky’s aria and the opening number from what is usually danced as the ‘Black Swan’ *pas de deux* from *Swan Lake*. But when there are plenty of other violin concertante works by Tchaikovsky that fit on to a disc rather neatly – the *Sérénade mélancolique* (composed for Auer) and *Valse scherzo* do indeed find their way into the running order here – these three arrangements feel like fillers. The Letter Scene is nicely played but ultimately one misses the vocal line, craving for the likes of Anna Netrebko or Galina Vishnevskaya. Similarly, in *Swan Lake* there are genuine opportunities for solo violin – the *Danse russe*. Perhaps Pentatone was trying to avoid duplicating the same programme Julia Fischer set down (splendidly) with Yakov Kreizberg and the Russian National Orchestra, which includes the gorgeous *Souvenir d’un lieu cher*. Nemanja Radulović, my current favourite Concerto recording, is at it too, pairing it with an arrangement for viola of the *Rococo Variations*.

Programme quibbles aside, Braunstein plays with slim, wiry tone, zipping along in the concerto neatly. The first movement doesn’t burst with the same personality as a player like Nemanja Radulović; comparing cadenzas is interesting, Fischer mighty of tone, Radulović balancing drama and poetry, Braunstein clean and lithe but a touch timid. But he observes dynamics scrupulously and really makes his violin sing in a hushed Canzonetta. The finale has a suitably jaunty, dancelike feel.

Braunstein plays with the BBC Symphony under Kirill Karabits – offering safe rather than inspired support when heard alongside the Borusan Istanbul Philharmonic (Radulović) or RNO (Fischer). It’s an account that is probably closest to Joshua Bell and the Berlin Phil – I wonder if Braunstein was concertmaster on that 2005 recording? – where the playing is very fine but a little ponderous in terms of character.

The concertante works are all attractively played by Braunstein but if you want the *Souvenir d’un lieu cher* too, I strongly recommend Julia Fischer. **Mark Pullinger**

Violin Concerto – selected comparisons:

Bell, BPO, Tilson Thomas (A/05) (SONY) SK93922

J Fischer, Russian Nat Orch, Kreizberg

(4/07) (PENT) PTC5186 095

Radulović, Borusan Istanbul PO, Goetzl

(2/18) (DG) 479 8089GH

Tchaikovsky

Symphony No 6, ‘Pathétique’, Op 74

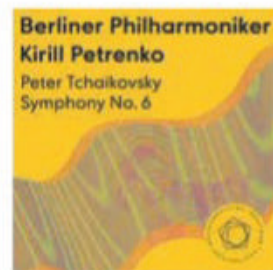
Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra / Kirill Petrenko

Berliner Philharmoniker © BPHR190261

(44’ • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie, Berlin,

March 22 & 23, 2017



Pierre Boulez – no conductor of Tchaikovsky – used to give performances

that rendered a pocket score redundant. There was no need to peer into the texture for hard-to-hear or often-overlooked details. There they all were, especially in the Stravinsky/Diaghilev ballets, registered not for the sake of score-bound pedantry or picaresque charm or virtuoso baton-twirling but because they made telling contributions to the story.

So it is with this *Pathétique*, the first preserved fruit of the Berlin Philharmonic’s relationship with its new music director. It seems churlish to complain of short measure when so much more of the symphony can be heard than on most rival versions: three-part brass chords in the outer movements that ring true in each note, inner-part clarinet figures that also evoke bells, and frantic string figuration brought off with breathtaking unanimity.

The sound world springs no surprises: this is unapologetically German-sounding Tchaikovsky, albeit sung with a strong Russian accent. The density and grain of the string timbre is unmistakably Berlin, yet Petrenko holds the bass in check while directing our attention always towards the line – not necessarily the big tune but a line of argument in the air and on the move.

Thus he holds back only fractionally before sweeping into the first movement’s trombone-led climax. There is a beautifully sprung waltz, pitched perfectly between Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Myaskovsky, highlighting how much Tchaikovsky achieves with as little as a downward tonic scale. Terror, triumph and hysteria build steadily through the March. Even the aspiring third subject of the finale is

at first moulded into life with a quiet dignity that could be confused with restraint, especially when compared with recordings celebrated for their unremitting intensity – by Furtwängler (live in Cairo with this orchestra – DG, 5/76), Mravinsky (DG, 11/61, 11/15) and Currentzis (Sony, 1/18).

Such a confusion would underrate Petrenko’s grasp of the symphony as a whole. He saves an ace up his sleeve for the muted horns that administer the *coup de grâce* at the finale’s climax, snarling here (at 6’40”) with a dreadful significance which is only rivalled by Currentzis with the aid of studio-engineered sorcery. By contrast at every stage this is a live performance, edited from two consecutive nights at the Philharmonie though technically unblemished by audience contributions beyond their palpable attentiveness.

While Petrenko tends to let his baton do the talking in public, he makes modest and lucid remarks in the booklet (in typically high-spec, BPO own-label packaging) that also present a salutary contrast to Currentzis’s high-flown essay. Though there is, as he observes, ‘a recording of everything by everyone’, few enough of them demand such close attention as this *Pathétique*. I came away from it not wrung out – as I might have been in the hall – but ever more humbled in the face of a masterpiece. **Peter Quanttrill**

Vaughan Williams

Symphonies – No 7, ‘Sinfonia antartica’^a; No 9

^aRowan Pierce *sop* ^aGraham Eccles *org* ^aTimothy

West *narr* ^aLadies of the Royal Liverpool

Philharmonic Choir; Royal Liverpool Philharmonic

Orchestra / Andrew Manze

Onyx © ONYX4190 (83’ • DDD)



The Seventh and Ninth Symphonies of Vaughan Williams are perhaps the least likely

to find their way into concert programmes; the Ninth in particular has never been popular. However, this new recording, which forms part of the last volume in the series of Vaughan Williams symphonies by the RLPO and Andrew Manze, has a vibrancy and clarity which do much to enhance their ‘cinderella’ reputation.

The creativity and fecundity of Vaughan Williams in his 70s (an age that now no longer seems ‘old’ in the traditional sense) never ceases to be a source of fascination. That he ‘discovered’ film music as a genre at the beginning of the Second World War is an extraordinary indication of his

youthful curiosity; but that he possessed the vision to produce a series of major scores such as *49th Parallel* and *Coastal Command* remains an indication of his indefatigable adaptability and professionalism.

As Lewis Foreman's excellent booklet notes remind us, Vaughan Williams's Seventh Symphony was by no means a suite or a 'rehashing' of material from his 1948 film score *Scott of the Antarctic*. Indeed, although one cannot help but be impressed by the vivid pictorial dimension of the symphony – and it is not difficult to recognise those ideas which were transferred from one idiom to the other – a comparison of the film score with the symphony reveals quite two different concepts at work, a factor in itself which bears testimony to Vaughan Williams's genius. Anyone listening to this recording will be thrilled to hear so much detail. There was much in the scoring that I had not picked up before – the use of the piano, elements of tuned and untuned percussion, woodwind effects – and the pathos of Timothy West's recited literary quotations from the head of each movement provides just the right amount of emotional entrée. The lyrical 'love' music of the penultimate movement, in this respect, is especially heartbreaking.

We now know, with access to Vaughan Williams's manuscripts, that the Ninth Symphony was based on a programme connected with Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, which perhaps helps to explain the more forbidding atmosphere of the work and some of the unusual musical rhetoric (as in the second movement). Certainly Manze brings out the tragic air of the more astringent elements of the score, not least the haunting sound of the saxophone 'trio' and the individual timbre of the flugelhorn; but he is also well attuned to the warmth of the symphony's many passages of euphony. The detail of the Scherzo, with its glittering array of percussion, harp and diabolic saxophones, is a revelation, and Manze exercises admirable dynamic control in the enigmatic 'landscape' of the finale. For any Vaughan Williams lover, this series of recordings is well worth the acquaintance for its probing, sympathetic interpretations and beauty of sound. **Jeremy Dibble**

'The Golden Violin'

'Music of the 20s'

Burleigh Moto perpetuo **Chaplin** City Lights – The Flower Shop. *Limelight* – The Terry Theme **Crowther** Gweedore Brae **Gershwin** An American in Paris. It ain't necessarily so. *Tempo di Blues* (all arr Heifetz) **Heifetz** When you make

love to me **Hollaender** Ich weiss nicht, zu wem ich gehöre **Huppertz** Metropolis – Suite **Novello** The Land of Might-Have-Been **Rachmaninov** Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini – Var 18 **Suk** Chant d'amour **Weill** The Ballad of Mack the Knife. What good would the moon be?

Daniel Röhn *vn* with **Mario Stefano Pietrodarchi** *bandoneón* **Württemberg Chamber Orchestra**, Heilbronn / **Case Scaglione**
Berlin Classics © 0301190BC (56' • DDD)



The title refers to a 'golden age of violin playing', nebulously defined in the booklet by 'the artistry of the likes of Bronisław Huberman, Jacques Thibaud and later Henryk Szering', none of whom played any of the repertoire on offer here. 'Music of the 1920s'? No fewer than 11 of the 15 pieces were not written during that decade. Bizarre. Although I enjoyed Röhn's earlier disc 'The Kreisler Story' (Berlin Classics, 2/17), which showcased a violinist of great promise, this disc is not quite so consistently successful.

So what have we actually got in this mis-labelled bran tub? First off is quite a discovery: Heifetz's 'concise version' (ie medley) of *An American in Paris*, unearthed only a few years ago among the violinist's papers. It's a promising start albeit somewhat compromised by the hi-mom-look-at-me orchestral arrangement by Stephen Buck, whose handiwork also threatens the prominence of the soloist in the two other Gershwin-Heifetz numbers and the 18th Variation from Rachmaninov's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*. The latter features, for reasons unknown, a part for the bandoneón, giving the piece, according to Röhn, 'Parisian flair', an element that is neither desirable nor relevant. Buck's arrangement of a suite from the music written by the forgotten Gottfried Huppertz for the great 1927 sci-fi silent *Metropolis* is attractive if nothing like as effective as the one conducted by Frank Strobel (Capriccio) in which the Radio Symphony Orchestra of Berlin rather show up the weedy strings and other inadequacies of the Württemberg Chamber Orchestra.

It is the orchestra, rather than piano, that accompanies three further Heifetz titles from the more than 50 short works he recorded for Decca between 1944 and 1946. Röhn makes a creditable stab at Burleigh's fiendish *Moto perpetuo*, Weill's 'Mack the Knife' (the phrase-endings lovingly tapered like Heifetz's) and the traditional Irish air *Gweedore Brae*, the last

two stylishly arranged by Jarkko Riihimäki. Still and all, and leaving aside his heavy intakes of breath, Röhn is no Heifetz. And, really, if you choose to play Chaplin's theme from *Limelight* and Hollaender's haunting song 'Ich weiss nicht, zu wem ich gehöre' (listen to Marlene Dietrich or Ute Lemper), please add a pinch of rubato to the mix. **Jeremy Nicholas**

'Jet Set!'

'Classical Glitterati'

Abel Symphonies, Op 14 – No 1, WK25; No 2, WK26 **Mozart** Le nozze di Figaro – Deh vieni, non tardar^a **Paisiello** La molinara – Nel cor più non mi sento^a **Reichardt** Symphony in G **S Storace** The Siege of Belgrade – Domestic peace^a **Zelter** Viola Concerto^b

^a**Gudrun Sidonie Otto** *sop*

The New Dutch Academy / Simon Murphy *va*
Pentatone © PTC5186 787 (66' • DDD/DSD)



The titular 'glitterati' are a disparate group of musicians linked only by the fact that they travelled and worked away from their home countries. Carl Friedrich Abel is perhaps the best known: he founded a famous series of concerts with JC Bach in London, where he met and influenced the eight-year-old Mozart, and reminiscences of the younger composer's style are audible in a pair of symphonies (published in 1778) that are sustained and lyrical, if still relying on gesture rather than singing melody for their primary material. The same might be said for an example by Johann Friedrich Reichardt, a Prussian who toured widely throughout Europe.

The disc opens, though, with a viola concerto by Carl Friedrich Zelter, two years younger than Mozart and a staunch champion of the Bach revival of the 19th century. This concerto bears trademarks of the Baroque in its clipped dotted rhythms but opens out into something more sustained with the entry of Simon Murphy's viola – rich-toned but with a hint of grain, blooming into plaintive sweetness as his left hand inches up the fingerboard.

Mozart's *Figaro* became a vehicle for the London soprano Nancy Storace, who created the role of Susanna in Vienna, and returned to London to star in a series of operas by her brother Stephen. Gudrun Sidonie Otto rather slides between notes but is equal to the *sostenuto* lines of Mozart's Garden aria and the coloratura of Stephen's 'Domestic peace', along with a cut-down encore version of Paisiello's 'Nel cor più non mi sento'.



Simultaneously wild and eloquent: Il Giardino Armonico open our ears to a thrillingly weird sound world

'Jet Set!' is a pleasing, varied programme, played finely by The New Dutch Academy, if without the last ounce of verve that characterises the playing of the elite period-instrument ensembles. The two Abel symphonies, though – plus Murphy's violism in the concerto – are particular highlights. **David Thresher**

'La morte della Ragione'

Agricola De tous bien plaine **Anonymous** La battaglia (pavana). La morte della Ragione (pavana) **Baldwine** 4 Vocum **Caresana** Tarantella **Castello** Sonata decimaquarta a 4 **Del Buono** Sonata VII Stravagante sull'Ave maris stella **Dunstable** Puzzle Canon **Eyck** Fantasia and Echo **G Gabrieli** Sonata XIII a otto voci **Gesualdo** Canzon Francese del Principe **Gombert** La rose (chanson) **Hayne van Ghizeghem** De tous biens plaine (chanson) **Josquin Desprez** De tous biens plaine. Nymphes des bois **Macque** Seconda stravaganza **Mainerio** Gagliarda. Schiarazula marazula, Ungarescha and Saltarello **Preston** Upon La mi re **Ruffo** Dormendo un giorno (capriccio) **Scheidt** Galliard Battaglia **Tye** In nomine 'Crye' **L Viadana** La Napolitana (sinfonia)
Il Giardino Armonico / Giovanni Antonini
Alpha © ALPHA450 (73' • DDD)



I welcome Il Giardino Armonico's commitment to filling our modern ears with such strange sounds with, well, open ears. As if one could block out such unapologetic strangeness anyway. The bizarre vibrato in John Dunstable's *Puzzle Canon*, the comic counterpoint in Josquin's *De tous biens plaine* and the breathy, wiry timbres of the reed instruments that buzz against the historical brass throughout: all these, and more, are thrillingly weird. With no fewer than 26 images, including close-ups of Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* as well as botanical specimens, weirdness is something that the CD booklet – a thing of beauty – also strives to capture. Its text weaves together writings from Aristotle to Shakespeare interspersed with historical definitions of performance techniques employed by its historically informed players; and rightly so, for it is expertise that this disc so generously showcases.

The performances are virtuoso in knowledge. I listen in awe and bowed respect to Il Giardino Armonico's 14 players as they perform on 33 different instruments over 27 tracks. From Gawain Glenton's improvisatory magic to Stefano Barneschi's divisions that flicker in brilliance, we are immersed in a sound world simultaneously wild and eloquent. Their instruments are not simply replicas or strung with gut. Unlike other period bands (which recently seem to pop up with the profusion of daffodils), the instrumentalists of Il Giardino Armonico have worked long and hard to refine their craft. The complete mastery of tremolos and *vibrazioni*, that cultivation of the 'moral attitude' that is *sprezzatura*; this is the closest modern bodies come to possessing period flesh. A highlight is the anonymous 16th-century pavana after which the album is named. Heaving in opulence, 'La morte della Ragione' is rich in bass and charged with a sensual energy. The solo playing in the early woodwind, brass and strings is constantly inventive, curiously discursive, capricious in scales and lavish in ornament. A carnival of the weird and wonderful from start to finish.
Mark Seow

Sibelius's Kullervo

Conductor **Thomas Dausgaard** talks to **Andrew Mellor** about this disturbing work's radicality

Sometimes I wonder how Sibelius could have been attracted to such a terrible story,' says Thomas Dausgaard at a point in our discussion of Sibelius's *Kullervo* (1891-92) that finds itself neck-deep in violence and murder.

An hour later, as the conductor is contemplating the score's final pages, he poses a possible answer. The anti-hero of Finland's literary touchstone *The Kalevala* – a youth unable to distinguish between right and wrong – has raped his sister and indulged in a fortifying rampage of ultra-violence. 'The story is placed on the borderline of heathen and Christian times,' says Dausgaard. 'That's one way in which it might have proved so magnetic for Sibelius: the moment Kullervo feels guilt and has to atone for his sins, we are at the beginning of a new era.'

Sibelius was at a threshold of his own, keen to forge something uniquely Finnish in sound having drunk in all manner of European music (Bruckner, Wagner, even Mascagni) while living in Vienna. The megalomaniac *Kullervo*, which he later considered revising but eventually simply withdrew, can feel untidy to Sibelius devotees. But Dausgaard isn't having any of that. 'We have to rid ourselves of our preconceptions about Sibelius and focus on the context of *this actual work*,' he says, punctuating those words with three firm prods of his score. 'If there are rough corners, that's part of it. Sibelius was trying to create another world in this piece. He was forcing his way out of existing languages and forging something radically his own using untried techniques. It is full of integrity.'

The concert performances that preceded the sessions for Hyperion – with Dausgaard's BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, the Lund Male Chorus and soloists Helena Juntunen and Benjamin Appl – were contextualised at Glasgow City Halls with Finnish *runo* song, herding calls, recitations from *The Kalevala* and the playing of Finland's plucked national instrument, the *kantele*. '*Kullervo* takes us into another time,' says Dausgaard; 'we wanted to help listeners coming straight from work to remove themselves a little, to step into another world.'

The *kantele* is right there on the first page of the score, suggests the conductor, in figures for second violins and violas which are 'typical of what would be played' on the instrument. That form of patterning figuration, natural to the instrument and intrinsic to Finland's oral tradition (and indeed to Sibelius's voice), lies behind the singular way in which this darkest of stories is told using repetition and layering.



Thomas Dausgaard with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Helena Juntunen and Benjamin Appl

'There is no Wagnerian scream when we realise that Kullervo has raped his sister. It's just the continuation of something that has been heard before and will be repeated again. That fundamentally separates this piece from the Romantic concept of telling a story,' says Dausgaard. 'It's like in the Norse sagas: we are given bare facts and it's up to us to reflect on the emotional depth. A very modern way of communicating.'

The clearest example of that is heard in the music that Sibelius creates for the male chorus: repetitive, largely unison, fixated on one note in the manner of *runo* song, strangely dispassionate in the recounting of horrific events. Each of the chorus's paragraphs launches with the same prosaic description: 'Kullervo, son of Kalervo, with the very bluest of stockings'. 'That neutrality is so strong,' says Dausgaard; 'there is a friction which, if we understand what the chorus is singing, builds huge tension. How can they just keep singing like that when there are all these things happening around them?'

What is happening around them is unsettling in both narrative and musical terms. As the full horror of Kullervo's deed looms, the orchestra writhes underneath those staid vocal lines. But it sticks to its runic five-in-a-bar metre as the otherwise rigid chorus cuts disconcertingly across it. 'That's really radical,' says Dausgaard.

Dausgaard's recording is notable for its sharp articulation and uncompromising brutality. 'There are moments when we were more inclined to play like folk musicians than like the civilised beauty-creators of a symphony orchestra,' he says, referring to the vernacular-style opening of the fourth movement. In that movement's predecessor, Dausgaard sought to capture 'the wild energy of Kullervo crossing the snow, with all this vitality inside him. The movement is made of many tiny parts, but Sibelius keeps the kaleidoscope turning the whole time. Look at bar 179; he's mixing the ideas constantly.'

Soon those same male voices recount the story's pivotal incident, as Kullervo pulls a woman into his sledge. 'The fabrics turned her dizzy,' they sing, 'and the shining gold deluded her.' 'The moment is so fantastic, so defining: life will never be the same again,' says Dausgaard. 'We sense her dizziness, that wild clarinet theme just going on and on at bar 260, with time suspended. She is hypnotised. Then a very inexplicit love scene at letter K and a love song that has none of the usual kind of beauty. By the dissonances of bar 317 you realise, if you haven't already, that there is something deeply, deeply wrong.'

'We were more inclined to play like folk musicians than like the civilised beauty-creators of a symphony orchestra'

There were clues along the way. Sibelius conceived his second 'variation' movement as a cradle song, but Dausgaard points to the music's duality: 'It's a lullaby, but it has something very aggressive underneath – that two-sidedness of Mahler. The horn jabs at the start to tell you that this music is not at peace with itself. Think of all those passages in the Seventh Symphony where something potentially explosive is happening deep underneath something apparently carefree.'

In the work's fifth and final movement Kullervo arrives at the spot he committed incestuous rape, noticing the withered grass. 'The orchestra is the nature here, lamenting with these painful lines from the first movement,' says Dausgaard. 'Sibelius has obviously reserved the special colour of the bass clarinet for this passage at bar 92 – is it the sword that tells Kullervo that it is happy to kill him, or his own inner voice of remorse? Very unusual.'

What Dausgaard describes as 'perhaps Sibelius's most experimental work' is not an easy one to play let alone conceptualise. 'There are moments where there's not much more than a sustained sense of mystery,' Dausgaard says, pointing to letter C in the first movement. 'These pages don't look like anything else I can think of,' he says of the third movement's two-page final chord and its *Più moderato* passage from bar 430, accompanying the sister's tale of shouting from the mountaintop.

But Dausgaard delights in the work's lack of late-Sibelius distillation, its rough contrasts and abrupt shifts, as in the score's final gesture. 'You have the chorus on this dominant seventh chord at S. It doesn't lead to C major as you'd like but to the bleak E minor with which we started. 'That's it?' I shrug. 'Absolutely,' Dausgaard responds, apparently moved just from looking at the notes. 'It's the essence of Sibelius: I'm not going to sweeten things up.'

► Dausgaard's *Kullervo* recording is out on June 28 and will be reviewed next issue



The Orchestra of the Americas Carlos Miguel Prieto



CKD 604

'Carlos Chávez's *Sinfonía india* uses a set of pre-Hispanic themes ... it's a lot of fun in its use of chugging cross-rhythms, deftly controlled by the conductor Carlos Miguel Prieto.'

— THE TIMES

Elizabeth Kenny



CKD 603

'... a wonderful new piece by Benjamin Oliver, *Extending from the inside*, which sounded a little like King Crimson's Robert Fripp guesting with the Young Marble Giants.'

— THE HERALD



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Chamber



Andrew Farach-Colton listens to the Girard Quartet's Saint-Saëns:

'They have a warm, beautifully blended tone and negotiate the work's myriad rhythmic and textural intricacies with élan' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 57**



Liam Cagney explores the music of Christopher Trapani:

'We're treated to a wonderfully rich acoustic palette through virtuoso playing and mobile harmonic polarities' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 58**

JS Bach

Goldberg Variations, BWV988. Suite No 1, BWV1066 (both arr Václav Vondrášek)

Arundo Quartet

Supraphon © SU4261-2 (54' • DDD)



Presently a bassoonist with the Berlin Philharmonic, Václav Vondrášek founded the

Arundo wind ensemble as a trio in 2003, and invited a bassoon colleague to join them for this Bach project. In arranging the *Goldberg Variations*, he explains in the booklet, he was most challenged by the virtuoso 'arabesque' variations that require hand-crossing on a keyboard. Presented here at rather conservative tempos, they do not come off with the prodigal flourish of either the keyboard original or Dmitri Sitkovetsky's popular arrangement for string trio.

The impression of elevated but rather faceless Harmoniemusik is reinforced by consistently detached articulation that almost perversely robs many of the slower or swung or dance variations of a legato line when the tools are available for it. Whether done to imitate a harpsichord or in the name of neat and tidy performance practice, the phrasing combines with a straitlaced approach to ornamentation and pulse, and total absence of repeats, to present the *Goldbergs* as polished but inconsequential background music.

Requiring much less in the way of arrangement, the Suite comes off better, though even here the Arundo players mark too little difference between, say, the French overture's central fugue and its grander outer sections. The subsequent dance movements inspire more graceful and subtly shaded phrasing, and in the Gavotte some rustic contrasts of timbre. But, again, why no repeats? In concert, with breath at a premium, the decision would be a pragmatic one. On a studio-recorded album running at

well under an hour, it feels unduly parsimonious. **Peter Quantrill**

Bartók

'Bartók Bound, Vol 1'

String Quartets - No 1, Op 7 Sz40;

No 2, Op 17 Sz67; No 4, Sz91

Ragazze Quartet

Channel Classics © CCS41419 (81' • DDD)



These are extremely well-focused and well-recorded

performances, the cello cadenza near the opening of the First Quartet's third movement and the first violin's plaintive response to it soon afterwards being fair cases in point. The Ragazze Quartet project a genuine sense of longing, whereas the dancing demeanour of the finale proper is very skilfully handled rhythm-wise and the quieter passages, haunting recollections which seem to reach back to some bygone memory, have an equally powerful impact.

In the Ragazze's hands the Second Quartet's opening anticipates the parallel mysteries at the start of the Third Quartet (I'm now intrigued at the prospect of hearing them play that masterpiece too), whereas the subdued top-speed coda of the *Allegro molto capriccioso* second movement rushes forth with reptilian agility. The mostly static mood of the Second Quartet's finale is extremely intense, especially from around 4'05", where Bartók's infinitely strange, richly textured harmonies gradually ignite on an accelerating crescendo only to die away in the wake of yet more rapt mystery. True, the Ragazzes aren't the only players who relish these and similar moments, but you sense a real rapport between group members and the score to hand.

The Fourth Quartet is perhaps given the best performance of all, the first movement cranky and obdurate, the two scherzos (whether muted or plucked)

full of sudden contrasts, the central slow movement almost Messiaenic in its evocation of animated birdsong – more fine cello-playing from Rebecca Wise – and the finale aggressively punk-like and unrelenting.

The Ragazze Quartet certainly cut the mustard. If Vol 2 is as good as this, there'll be cause to celebrate. **Rob Cowan**

Beethoven

'Complete Piano Trios, Vol 3'

Piano Trios - No 5, 'Ghost', Op 70 No 1;

No 6, Op 70 No 2. Variations on an Original Theme, Op 44

Van Baerle Trio

Challenge Classics © CC72781 (72' • DDD/DSD)



When the Van Baerle Trio released the first disc in their Beethoven cycle

(4/18), I reviewed it here with a mixture of surprise and delight. Now they reach the Op 70 pair and the surprise is less, but the delight remains the same. For those who are unaware, these are modern-instrument performances but pianist Hannes Minnaar plays on a 2017-vintage straight-strung Chris Maene concert grand, placing the piano on something like an equal footing with the two strings.

The effect is liberating and, in these joyous, playful performances, utterly refreshing. Violinist Maria Milstein and cellist Gideon den Herder never have to strain for effect, and with the engineers capturing an unglossy, small-room sound, the effect is of real chamber music – up close and very personal. The bubbling, translucent sound of the piano informs the interpretations. The three positively hammer out the headlong opening motif of the *Ghost* Trio, before letting a spirit of song and dance colour everything they play.

And yes, that includes the famously gothic slow movement of Op 70 No 1. If it never feels as profoundly still as some



The Ragazze Quartet shine in their first volume of Bartók's demanding string quartets

interpretations, the characterisation is wonderfully vivid (listen for Minnaar's ominous stalking bass). Op 70 No 2 has a sense of intimacy even in its livelier outer movements. I'd have liked a little less languor in the third movement, but not at the expense of such a deliciously buoyant and droll second-movement *Allegretto*. Wit is to the fore, too, in the Op 44 Variations. Considering that the theme is barely more than a string of arpeggios, it's a little miracle to hear just how much humour and verve the Van Baerles find in this far-from-vintage Beethoven. I can't wait to hear their *Archduke*. **Richard Bratby**

Beethoven · Hillborg

Beethoven String Quartets - No 3, Op 18 No 3; No 14, Op 131 **Hillborg** Kongsgaard Variations
Calder Quartet

Pentatone (P) PTC5186 718 (79' • DDD/DSD)



Beethoven apparently once described himself as a new Bacchus. So he'd surely have approved of the winery in Napa Valley which – we learn in the booklet to this

release from the Calder Quartet – produces a wine named after the Arietta from his Op 111 Piano Sonata. This (presumably excellent) tippie is the principal inspiration for Anders Hillborg's *Kongsgaard Variations*, which the Calder Quartet have placed between Beethoven's most backward-looking early quartet and his most forward-looking late one.

And while the Calders' Beethoven is historically informed only in the loosest possible sense – tempos are fresh, rhythms are buoyant and vibrato is deployed as expression demands – their performances have something of the spirit of the composer's own era. They ease carefully into Op 18 No 3 and let the momentum accumulate, often arriving at the moment of maximum, unbridled Beethovenian release towards the end of the movement.

In its way, that's as arresting in the slow movement of Op 18 No 3 as it is in the muscular, vaulting climax of the finale to Op 131; I enjoyed the springy, tensile strength of the ensemble at that point. Elsewhere there's scope for both lyricism and Haydnish wit, and in Pentatone's lucid recorded sound you really hear the inner parts unfolding in the first movement of Op 131. I can think of late Beethoven that

probes a lot deeper but I've never heard the quiet pay-off at the end of Op 18 No 3 sound like quite so much of an open question. As for the Hillborg – well, the idea is perhaps more exciting than the actual music, but with playing of such easy virtuosity, it blossoms very beguilingly. One to drink now, perhaps, rather than lay down in the cellar.

Richard Bratby

Beethoven · Bolcom · Brahms

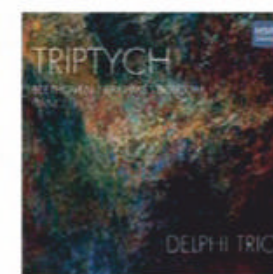
'Triptych'

Beethoven Piano Trio No 6, Op 70 No 2 **Bolcom**

Piano Trio **Brahms** Piano Trio No 3, Op 101

Delphi Piano Trio

MSR Classics (P) MS1674 (69' • DDD)



The Delphi Piano Trio are a prize-winning ensemble from North America

for whom 'food and friendship ... are at the heart of great chamber music' and this social aspect of performing informs both their playing and social media/community activities. Listening to this typical

programme of established classics framing a premiere recording – Bolcom’s 2014 Trio, of which they gave the first concert outing as well – their mutual understanding and interaction are palpable.

They take a nicely expansive approach to Beethoven’s Op 70 No 2, especially in the *Allegretto ma non troppo* third movement, lingering in the long lyrical central episode. It is all very beautifully done and elsewhere the Delphis catch the cut-and-thrust of Beethoven’s invention very nicely, especially in the double-variation-form second movement, even if they cannot quite match the incisiveness of Melnikov, Faust and Queyras. Granted, the rival trio are more period-orientated in approach (not least with Melnikov’s fortepiano), which gives their sound a sharper edge, but theirs is an even deeper level of musical insight which the American ensemble don’t quite achieve.

Nonetheless, the Delphi Trio’s account is still a strong one, as is their very tidy account of Brahms’s compact late C minor Trio (1886). This elicits the finest playing on the disc, the three players at their very best, completely at one with Brahms’s concentrated writing. So they are, too, in the Bolcom, which they commissioned from the 76-year-old composer and recorded to celebrate his 80th birthday last year. The outer pair of its three movements (respectively *energetic* and *strongly driven*; the lower case titles are intentional) are rather sectional and concise in design, unlike the central *serene, molto sostenuto*, which is much more expansive and a touch Messiaen-like. The Haydn-esque false ending in the finale is a nice touch. First-rate sound. **Guy Rickards**

Beethoven – selected comparison:

Melnikov, Faust, Queyras (2/14) (HARM) HMC90 2125

Catoire • Friedman

Catoire Piano Quintet, Op 28

Friedman Piano Quintet

Nils-Erik Sparf, Ulf Forsberg vns Ellen Nisbeth va

Andreas Brantelid vc Bengt Forsberg pf

BIS © BIS2314 (62’ • DDD/DSD)



Bengt Forsberg has always been a great champion of the underdog and

he has gathered around him a quartet of musicians who clearly feel the same way. Both these quintets are rarities, having been only rarely previously recorded. Despite his French name, Catoire was a Russian who trained as a pianist with Liszt’s pupil Karl Klindworth, was

encouraged as a composer by Tchaikovsky and then taught by Rimsky-Korsakov and Liadov.

The opening movement of Catoire’s Quintet is dominated by a sense of tumult, Forsberg leading the way and making light of the considerable demands made on the pianist. You wouldn’t exactly come away humming the tunes but the players make the best of its slightly earnest striving quality and avoid the discourse ever becoming too heavy-going.

Things begin to get interesting in the slow movement, which opens with a keening viola melody imaginatively set against delicate piano and pizzicato strings. Forsberg et al make much of every phrase, occasionally sounding a little studied. But the switch to E flat major, *Con intimo sentimento*, introduced by the strings, is beguilingly done and the way the mood gradually becomes more troubled is finely judged, as is the high-lying *cantando* writing and the movement’s muted close.

Catoire again demonstrates his ear for imaginative textures in the finale, the opening high-lying and with a skittish quality, which contrasts with more trenchant writing. There are plenty of opportunities for each player to show his or her mettle but the composer also delights in big *tutti*s – which never get heavy in this performance. It finally reaches a consoling mood, with a shimmering close that is tellingly realised here.

Catoire’s Quintet was written in 1914; from four years later comes Friedman’s and again it sounds more part of the Romantic tradition than anything 20th-century. That quality is vividly conveyed in this reading, which comes, perhaps in part, from the fact that this is an ensemble of soloists rather than pianist plus established quartet, as in the case of the Szymanowski and Jonathan Plowright. After the turbulent opening, with a chromatically descending theme that could in the wrong hands sound slightly Hammer Horror, comes a lilting waltz-like second idea. Forsberg’s group make much of the contrast between the two, while the Szymanowski/Plowright are more streamlined in effect. There’s a palpable sense of excitement at the key climaxes in this new recording – whether you prefer that or the Hyperion set is really down to taste.

Friedman’s slow movement is nominally a set of variations but sounds for all the world like a sequence of miniatures. Forsberg et al lovingly mould the theme itself, though I find them a little studied in the lively mazurka variation compared to Plowright and friends, and in the Barcarolle, too, I prefer the more delicate

textures of the earlier account. The finale begins pensively, based on a folk-like tune that contrasts with a more energetic second idea. While Plowright and the Szymanowski give the folk flavour a real tang, I like the way Forsberg and friends bring out the reminiscences from earlier in the work, displaying great colour and imagination. A fascinating addition to the quintet discography. **Harriet Smith**

Friedman – comparative version:

Plowright, Szymanowski Qt (A/16) (HYPE) CDA68124

Debussy • Fauré

‘Essence’

Debussy Prélude à L’après-midi d’un faune.

Préludes, Book 1 – No 8, La fille aux cheveux de lin. Suite bergamasque – Clair de lune

Fauré Après un rêve, Op 7 No 1. Fantaisie, Op 79.

Après un rêve, Op 7 No 1. Fantaisie, Op 79.

Flute (Violin) Sonata, Op 13

Lisa Friend fl Rohan de Silva pf

Chandos © CHAN20084 (54’ • DDD)



Lisa Friend and Rohan de Silva’s new recital contains only one work – Fauré’s Op 79

Fantaisie – that was actually written for flute and piano. The remainder are transcriptions, and whether you care for the disc as a whole will depend in part, I suspect, on how well you think they serve or reflect the original works. ‘Après un rêve’ was frequently arranged as an instrumental salon piece in Fauré’s own day, and its serene, dreamy melody suits the flute extremely well. The arrangement of ‘Clair de lune’ by the Austrian composer Peter Kolman is also effective, with the main melody drifting high above the piano chords, like the moon itself hovering over the ‘promenade sentimentale’ (Debussy’s subtitle for the piece) that is taking place beneath.

Arranging the larger works is, of course, trickier. The lyrical lines of Fauré’s A major Sonata transfer perfectly well to the flute in Robert Stallman’s version. The instrument’s sweetness, however, precludes the moments of abrasion and darkness in the violin original; the big, end-of-movement cadences seem anticlimactic without multiple-stopping; and single staccato notes don’t have the same impact as pizzicatos in the Scherzo. *Faune*, meanwhile, comes in an arrangement by Karl Lenski, in which the flautist ducks and weaves his or her way through successive woodwind solos, sometimes abandoning the orchestral first flute’s line to the pianist: it’s skilfully done but inevitably lacks the colour and sensuality of the original.

The performances are persuasive, though. The sultry tone that Friend adopts at the start of *Faune* is admirably sustained throughout the piece, though the recording here places her too far forward: de Silva ideally needs to be more prominent in places, particularly when taking over the ecstatic string passage that offsets the flute's sighing phrases at five bars after fig 7. Elsewhere the flute-piano balance is more carefully calibrated. 'Clair de lune' and 'Après un rêve' both sound exquisite, though 'La fille aux cheveux de lin', in an arrangement by Arthur Hartmann, gets a more forthright, direct performance than we usually hear of the original. De Silva to some extent comes into his own in the Fauré Sonata, matching the sweep and elegance of Friend's phrasing with playing of considerable suppleness and subtlety throughout. Not a disc for purists but very enjoyable in its own right.

Tim Ashley

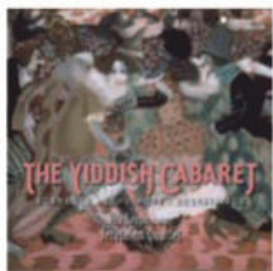
Desyatnikov · Korngold · Schulhoff

'The Yiddish Cabaret'

Desyatnikov Jiddisch^a Korngold String Quartet No 2, Op 26 Schulhoff Five Pieces

^aHila Baggio *sop* Jerusalem Quartet

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2631 (60' • DDD)



Whatever one makes of the title, 'The Yiddish Cabaret' is an enjoyable if rather

lopsided concept, with the main work opening the programme. Korngold's three string quartets have gradually entered the repertoire, with the Second (1933) – less inhibited and more substantial than those either side – the most appealing. The Jerusalem Quartet have the measure of its lively *Allegro* and suave closing Waltz, not to mention the teasing Intermezzo, with its deft fugal Trio, but it is the *Larghetto*, with its aching harmonics and eloquent cantilena, that proves the highlight.

Where Korngold ingratiates, Schulhoff satirises: his Five Pieces (1923) come from a period that saw most of his notable chamber works. Each of the vignettes is a take-off of a familiar dance, with the Jerusalem mindful (and rightly so) not to overplay their sardonic humour so that pieces such as the 'Alla Serenata' or 'Alla Tango milonga' (already a familiar encore) emerge without undue caricature. These make an effective transition into *Jiddisch* (2018), five songs on popular texts between them evoking Warsaw's inter-

GRAMOPHONE *talks to ...*

Bengt Forsberg

On the joys of discovering the piano quintets by Georgy Catoire and Ignaz Friedman

How did you discover the music of Catoire and Friedman – and what drew you to the piano quintets?

Catoire's music was not very well known to me, except for a few shorter but exquisite piano pieces, until an English friend and fine viola player suggested the Quintet for a festival in Belgium. I was immediately captivated by this music's strange beauty. Friedman was another story: I greatly admired his totally inimitable Chopin interpretations and I had played quite a lot of his music – as well as smaller pieces and transcriptions, the *Viennese Dances*, the Ballade, Op 66, and the magnificent Suite for two pianos. So I was thrilled to discover another of his few large-scale pieces.

What can listeners expect from Friedman's Piano Quintet?

The first movement is dramatic, sometimes even tragic, while the second movement is a set of variations (*Larghetto, con somma espressione*) which take different shapes – including scherzo, funeral march, minuet, barcarolle and fugue. Finally, the last movement is an Epilogue that brings back motifs from both the two previous movements in a way that is very satisfying. Although Friedman was a virtuoso pianist, this work is deeply poetic rather than being primarily a vehicle for the pianist.



Although the work is predominantly poetic is it obvious that it was written by a pianist?

Yes, absolutely. Even at its most demanding it lies wonderfully under the hands. But as well as being idiomatic for the piano, it seems that Friedman had a great understanding of expressive string-writing.

Some of Catoire's music has a superficial similarity with Scriabin. Is this true of his Piano Quintet?

Not really. Although one might draw comparisons with works like the Fourth Piano Sonata or the *Poèmes*, Op 32, Catoire's sense of ecstasy is of a totally different kind. The Piano Quintet reveals an artist of the utmost sensitivity; the passion of the music is unusually fragile. He refuses to give the music an orderly structure, which contributes to a weightless, elusive expression. He also very rarely uses the full available forces at climaxes, so when he does the result is even more touching. One thing it has in common with the Friedman is that they both end in a very eloquent silence.

war Jewish street life in alternately cynical and affectionate terms, stylishly set by the Ukrainian composer Leonid Desyatnikov and eloquently rendered by Hila Baggio – with occasional 'interjections' from the ensemble.

Clearly this is a disc that should attract all those for whom the overall concept is the main draw. Anyone wanting the Korngold quartets could turn to that by the Doric Quartet (Chandos, 11/10), while the Aviv Quartet offer a decent survey of Schulhoff's quartet output (Naxos). Those investing in the Jerusalem option will find standards of both playing and recording on a par with the ensemble's previous releases from this source, and hence wholly commendable.

Richard Whitehouse

Haas · Krása · Schulhoff · Ullmann

Haas String Quartet No 2, 'From the Monkey Mountains', Op 7^a Krása Theme and Variations Schulhoff Five Pieces Ullmann String Quartet No 3, Op 46

Bennewitz Quartet with ^aPavel Rehberger *perc* Supraphon © SU4265-2 (66' • DDD)



The association of Pavel Haas, Hans Krása and Viktor Ullman – all born

in either 1898 or 1899 and perishing in Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944 via a spell in Terezín – and the slightly older Erwin Schulhoff (b1894, died in 1942 in

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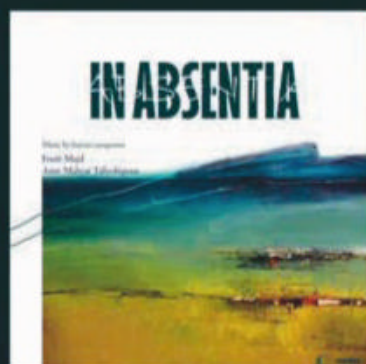


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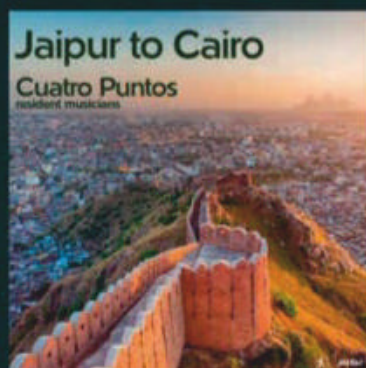
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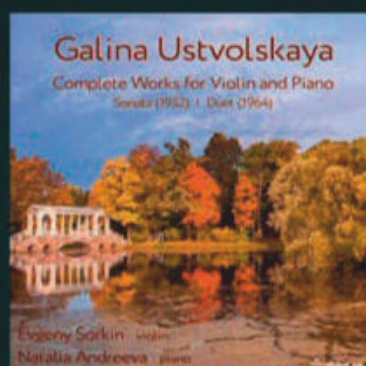
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Wülzburg concentration camp) is long established. Together, they formed the cutting edge of Czech music following – chronologically, if not artistically – in Martinů's wake. Their quartet output shows how strong-minded they were, not least in assimilating a wide range of influences: Janáček (Haas and, to a point, Ullmann), Schoenberg (Krása and Ullmann – the latter also studied with Hába), jazz (notably Schulhoff) and, of course, Stravinsky (all of them).

The quartets collected here arguably represent their foremost achievements in the genre. Haas's fine Third never quite matches the élan of its predecessor (1925) with its daring optional part for percussion in the finale. This is very nicely performed by Pavel Rehberger, giving Colin Currie – who partnered the Pavel Haas Quartet in their *Gramophone* Award-winning recording – a good run for his money. In the Five Pieces (1923), Schulhoff achieved his most engaging composition for quartet, which at times might fool the 'innocent ear' into thinking it a lost Shostakovich work (as does Schulhoff's Second Quartet), until one realises it pre-dates the premiere of the Russian's First Symphony (let alone any of his quartets) by three years. Krása's Theme and Variations (1935-36) is a beautifully conceived set, still relatively carefree, unlike Ullman's quartet, composed looking out of the abyss in Terezín.

The Bennewitz Quartet, who I had not heard perform before, are a wonderfully balanced ensemble with superb intonation and internal harmony. Their accounts of all of these works are exemplary and they need fear no comparison with any of their rivals. Wonderfully warm and natural sound from Supraphon, too. A splendid disc.

Guy Rickards

Haas – selected comparisons:

Hawthorne Qt (3/94) (DECC) ➔ 440 853-2DH

Pavel Haas Qt (11/06) (SUPR) SU3877-2

Haas, Ullmann – selected comparison:

Nash Ens (4/13) (HYPE) CDA67973

Schulhoff – selected comparison:

Voce Qt (5/17) (ALPH) ALPHA268

Ullmann – selected comparison:

Dover Qt (2/18) (CED) CDR90000 173

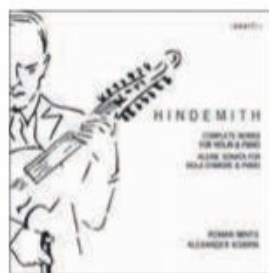
Hindemith

Violin Sonatas^a – in C; in E; Op 11 No 1; Op 11 No 2. Kleine Sonata, Op 25 No 2^b. Nobilissima visione – Meditation^a. Trauermusik^a

Roman Mints^avn/^bva d'amore

Alexander Kobrin pf

Quartz Ⓢ QTZ2132 (77' • DDD)



As his introductory remarks make plain, Roman Mints has been an advocate for Hindemith from the outset of his career.

This disc collates all the composer's music for violin and piano, starting with the two violin sonatas that initiate his Op 11. Whereas that in E flat, with its proclamatory first movement and speculative successor, has an almost introductory feel, that in D (both 1918) represents an unequivocal statement of intent, its three movements taking in fraught emotion then wistful eloquence before culminating in a mood of brusque resolve.

A not dissimilar contrast is evident in the subsequent violin sonatas. Composed in the wake of the opera *Mathis der Maler*, that in E (1935) finds Hindemith at his most ingratiating, its limpid opening movement followed by the deftest synthesis of slow movement and finale. By contrast, the Sonata in C (1939) showcases his mature tonal idiom at its most wide-ranging, whether in the peremptory first movement, searching central intermezzo or the majestic triple fugue whose contrapuntal dexterity and rhythmic propulsion make for a powerful conclusion.

Mints plays with the incisiveness and flexibility that these works require but seldom receive, with Alexander Kobrin unstinting in support. Equally persuasive are the *Kleine Sonata* for viola d'amore (1922), tensile outer movements framing one of Hindemith's most affecting *adagios*, and pieces initially written for viola: the elegiac *Trauermusik* (1936) and soulful Meditation from the ballet *Nobilissima visione* (1938). Sound and annotations reflect Quartz's customary standards, though Guy Rickards might have been consulted over the spelling of his surname.

Richard Whitehouse

Janáček · Ligeti

Janáček String Quartets – No 1, 'The Kreutzer Sonata'; No 2, 'Intimate Letters' **Ligeti** String Quartet No 1, 'Métamorphoses nocturnes'

Belcea Quartet

Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA454 (71' • DDD)



It is still well within living memory that Janáček's two string quartets gave up

their cult status to become pillars of the repertoire, and a glance at the extensive discography confirms that any newcomer must offer something radical or distinctive to compete with the best now available.

The main interpretative obstacle in the First Quartet (1923) is how to gauge the progression of its first three movements so the finale is a culmination without obliterating what went before. The Belcea succeed admirably in this respect: they vividly project the agitated recitatives of the initial movement, along with the insinuating folk-inflected motifs and jagged expressive contrasts of those that follow. In the finale, where the anguished climax graphically conveys the wracked emotion of Tolstoy's tragic novella, they accumulate a remorseless intensity.

On a marginally larger scale, the Second Quartet (1928) marks a formal advance in that each of its movements only comes into focus within the greater context. Hence those outbursts of fraught lyricism in the opening movement, the smouldering pathos then agitated whimsy of its successors, before a finale whose dancelike refrain interlinks episodes that recall earlier ideas as if infusing them with renewed significance en route to an ending as decisive as it is affirmative. The Belcea leave no doubt as to this whole being more than the sum of its parts.

It's interesting that Ligeti's First Quartet (1954) has only latterly found favour – the amalgam of Bartókian rhythms and textures with Bergian emotional introspection, towards which Ligeti expressed guarded approval, being precisely its attraction for today's ensembles. The Belcea convey its reckless audacity while being mindful of the metamorphic process which ensures overall cohesion. This is recommended if this particular coupling appeals, though setting the Ligeti between the Janáček works better than hearing it as an oblique addendum. **Richard Whitehouse**

Saint-Saëns

String Quartet No 1, Op 112. Piano Quintet, Op 14^a

Girard Quartet with ^a**Guillaume Bellom** pf

B Records Ⓢ LBM018 (59' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Fondation Singer-Polignac, Paris, March 22, 2018



Saint-Saëns was barely out of his teens when he wrote his only

Piano Quintet (1855) – an attractive work, even if its inspiration and craftsmanship are inconsistent. The weaknesses lie

mainly in the tempestuous first movement, where so much of the material feels prefatory. Guillaume Bellom and the Girard Quartet are persuasive advocates, however, playing it with a conviction that borders on the zealous. It's virtually note-perfect, too, which is particularly impressive given the concerto-like demands of the piano part and the fact that the recording was made at a single live concert.

Andrea Lucchesini and the Quartetto di Cremona, who offer the same coupling, provide somewhat greater refinement in the remaining movements, although Bellom and the Girard have their moments. Their playing in the *Andante sostenuto* can be rapturous – try, say, the moonlit interlude at 1'39". They home in on the macabre character of the *Presto* third movement and imbue the fugal finale with a careful balance of expansive gesture and affectionate detail. Unfortunately, they're let down by an overly resonant recording in which loud passages become clangorous and clouded.

The String Quartet (1899) fares better sonically, though it's still gauzy. The four Girard siblings have a warm, beautifully blended tone and negotiate the work's myriad rhythmic and textural intricacies with élan. How closely attuned they are to the opening *Allegro's* slightly obsessive and deeply melancholic qualities, and how firm yet flexible a grip they keep on the vertiginously syncopated Scherzo. I'm troubled, though, by the lack of real *piano* or *pianissimo* playing, such a crucial component in such intensely intimate music. Whether this is the fault of the musicians or the microphone placement, I can't say, but it spoils an otherwise heartfelt reading of the *Molto adagio* – the Cremona play it with an enthralling hush. In the finale, on the other hand, the Girard's combination of lilt and brio is far preferable to the Cremona's relative stodginess.

In sum, stick with the Cremona for the Piano Quintet. As for the shockingly underrated String Quartet, search out the Miami Quartet's superb recording for Conifer (3/98 – nla); it's well worth the hunt.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Lucchesini, Cremona Qt (12/16) (AUDI) AUDITE97 728

Shostakovich • R Strauss

Shostakovich Violin Sonata, Op 134

R Strauss Violin Sonata, Op 18

Franziska Pietsch vn **Josu de Solaun** pf

Audite © AUDITE97 759 (64' • DDD)



Prokofiev concerto couplings are two a penny these

days yet Franziska Pietsch caused something of a stir with her recent contender (2/18), following it up with an equally impressive disc of solo violin works by Bartók, Prokofiev and Ysaÿe (12/18).

Here she is back on familiar turf, having made her recent career as a chamber music specialist with such ensembles as the Trio Testore and Trio Lirico. Her new recital colleague, Josu de Solaun, has already undertaken a survey of the complete Enescu piano music for Naxos. A Spanish-born American resident and a multiple prize-winner in his own right, his playing has strength without steeliness and a distinctive warmth and finesse which may or may not be associated with his Shigeru Kawai instrument. Very much an equal partner, he also contributes the booklet notes. Pietsch seems an edgier kind of artist, with the frank emotionalism and potential resort to wide vibrato you might associate with Russian players.

Immaculately pitched in every sense, their Strauss is worth sampling even for those normally resistant to this kind of Romantic fare. Marginally less sympathetic than the sweet and subtle reading from Kyung Wha Chung and Krystian Zimerman, their music-making lacks nothing in intensity or fine detailing and is captured in very lifelike sound in the famous acoustic of the Jesus-Christus-Kirche of Berlin-Dahlem. Some may detect a lack of intimacy, sonic or otherwise; I'd say the score can take it.

In the more ubiquitous Shostakovich the pair are, at least initially, less stoical than David Oistrakh or Oleg Kagan, both with Sviatoslav Richter, injecting light as well as shade without sounding remotely facile. The extremely virtuoso second movement finds Pietsch positively assaulting her strings. The finale is again heartfelt but never too far over the top.

All in all an intriguing offering, even if the startlingly disparate programme won't file easily on the shelves of those of us still in thrall to physical format. **David Gutman**

Strauss – selected comparison:

Chung, Zimerman (2/90^R) (DG) 457 907-2GGA

Shostakovich – selected comparisons:

Oistrakh, Richter (8/71^R) (MELO) MELCD100 227030

Kagan, Richter (5/96^R) (ALTO) ALC1328

Trapani

Cognitive Consonance^a. Passing Through, Staying Put^b. The Silence of a Falling Star Lights Up a Purple Sky^c. Visions and Revisions^d. Waterlines^e

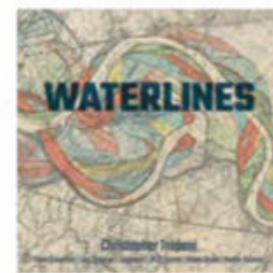
^eLucy Dhegrae voice ^cMarilyn Nonken pf

^aChristopher Trapani hexaphonic gtr

^aDidem Başar qanûn ^bLongleash; ^dJack Quartet;

^aTalea Ensemble / James Baker

New Focus © FCR200 (70' • DDD • T)



Christopher Trapani is one of America's musical prospects. Still in his thirties (just

about), Trapani has studied at IRCAM, the Royal College of Music, Columbia and Harvard and in Turkey. Along the way he has won the prestigious Gaudeamus Prize and has just won a Guggenheim Fellowship. With his apprenticeship finished, this debut shows what he's about.

An important strand in Trapani's music is his New Orleans heritage. It shines through on the titular song-cycle *Waterlines* (2012), for mezzo, guitar, small ensemble, and electronics, given a lively performance by Talea and Lucy Dhegrae. Following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, Trapani wrote *Waterlines* using material from vintage New Orleans country and blues recordings. In the opening song 'Can't feel at home', the mezzo's mixolydian ballad is gradually joined by a finely wrought texture of instrumental strums and whisps and microtones. If at times (as at the opening of 'Poor boy blues') I couldn't help wondering whether an African American blues singer might give more heft, the musical detail keeps you coming back; 'Poor boy blues', for example, teasingly mixes Romantic woodwind filigree, blues vocals and spectralist harmonic sculpting.

Precursors for such use of American folk music come readily to hand, from Copland to Partch. Trapani's style, though, is lively, up to date and distinctive. I was lucky enough to hear the Jack Quartet premiere the string quartet *Visions and Revisions* at Wigmore Hall in 2013. Listening to *Visions and Revisions* on this record, it is every bit as enigmatic and introspective. Ever-so-brief lyrical shards of Bob Dylan's 'Visions of Johanna' are analysed and resynthesised in spectralist manner; glassy harmonics, bow bounces and string sweeps, along with close counterpoint, articulate a mercurial tapestry.

A general theme of itinerancy culminates in the album's standout work. *Cognitive Consonance* (2010) explores links between Turkish classical, European



Immaculately pitched: the violinist Franziska Pietsch and pianist Josu de Solaun play Strauss and Shostakovich

classical and rock. The opening section, 'Disorientation', centres on the qanûn, a plucked Turkish dulcimer tuned microtonally. We're treated to a wonderfully rich acoustic palette through virtuoso playing and mobile harmonic polarities. The second movement, 'Westering', centred on hexaphonic electric guitar, is of the more familiar post-spectralist style heavily mined at IRCAM. Where, as often, the music shoots free of such influences it is at its strongest. Trapani's debut whets the appetite for what will come next. **Liam Cagney**

Vaughan Williams

'Viola Fantasia - Complete

Works for Viola and Piano'

Fantasia on Greensleeves. Fantasia on Sussex Folk Tunes. Romance. Six Studies in English Folk Song. Suite. Four Hymns^a

Martin Outram *va* **Julian Rolton** *pf* with

^a**Mark Padmore** *ten*

Albion © ALBCD036 (69' • DDD • T)



This latest anthology from those enterprising folk at Albion

Records launches in fine style with the endearingly personal Suite that Vaughan Williams fashioned for the great viola virtuoso Lionel Tertis (1876-1975), who gave the first performance with Sargent and the LPO at the Queen's Hall in November 1934. The composer's own arrangement with piano appeared two years later and is splendidly served on this occasion, Martin Outram and Julian Rolton as acutely responsive to the pensive musings of the substantial 'Ballade' and radiant lyricism of the 'Musette' as they are to the quirky mischief of the 'Polka mélancolique' and high jinks of the boisterous concluding 'Galop'.

It seems that Tertis's playing may well have been the inspiration behind the *Romance* of 1914, the manuscript of which only came to light after RVW's death in 1958. The composer's lifelong, deeply touching affinity with the instrument he had first taken up as a schoolboy is memorably displayed in this wholly characteristic piece, which finally received its premiere on January 19, 1962, by that distinguished Tertis pupil, Bernard Shore (1896-1985), who had served as principal viola of both the Queen's Hall Orchestra and Boult's magnificent BBC Symphony

Orchestra. Suffice to say, Outram and Rolton do it proud, while both the *Fantasia on Greensleeves* (in Watson Forbes's 1947 adaptation) and *Six Studies in English Folk Song* come up as fresh as new paint in their hands.

The pair also lend dashing advocacy to John Lenehan's newly published arrangement of the *Fantasia on Sussex Folk Tunes* (inscribed to Pablo Casals and premiered by him at a Royal Philharmonic Society concert on March 13, 1930, when RVW was awarded that august institution's Beethoven Gold Medal). Last, but definitely not least, we're treated to a gloriously fervent outing for the underrated Four Hymns for tenor, piano and viola. Completed in 1914 but not heard until 1920, these marvellous settings of texts by (among others) Dr Isaac Watts (1674-1748) and the metaphysical poet Richard Crashaw (1613-49) are superbly served here, with Mark Padmore at his customarily commanding, discerning best.

Boasting exemplary production values throughout, this issue has already afforded me copious pleasure. Outram himself supplies an eloquent, highly informative booklet essay.

Andrew Achenbach

'From the Ground Up'

'The Chaconne'

Anonymous Vuestros ojos tienen d'amor no sé qué. Yo soy la locura (arr Henri de Bailly)

JS Bach Solo Violin Partita No 2, BWV1004 -

Chaconne **Bogdanović** Suite breve - Chaconne

Marmén Inside One Breath **Pellegrini**

Armoniosi concerti sopra la chitarra spagnuola

- Chiaccona in parte variate alla vera spagnuola

Piccinini Intavolatura per liuto et di chitarrone,

I libro - Ciaccona in partite variate **Purcell**

Chacony, Z730 *plus improvisations and remixes,*

and readings by **Samuel West**

O/Modernt / Hugo Ticcianti *vn*

Signum © SIGCD574 (55' • DDD)



Hugo Ticcianti clearly delights in the elusive. His biography, unlike

those of his colleagues, does not mention a single orchestra or musician he has played with by name, but rather that he recently spent two weeks 'in an ashram at the foot of the Himalayas where he chanted every morning, meditated and swept the floors by day, and in the evenings sat cross-legged by a fire, playing Bach to barefooted monks'. While extreme devotion to mindfulness might not be for everyone, this release from O/Modernt deserves 55 minutes and 22 seconds of your time. There are so many good things about 'From the Ground Up: The Chaconne' that I worry this review will read like a shopping list for loveliness. First, there are the delightful little chaconnes scattered throughout the album. Ticcianti surrounds himself with instrumentalists so at one with the chaconne repertoire, musicians who bring the genre's inherent sexiness and sway to every note. Christoph Sommer and Karl Nyhlin's plucking in Domenico Pellegrini's *Chiaccona* is utterly beautiful, unravelling and gathering momentum with psychic ease and synchronised breath; dissonances are resolved with unworked sincerity; and when you think the chaconne has reached its peak and can blossom no more, Cecilia Knudtsen's scalic lines emerge from the texture like fragile sunshine.

Ticcianti's own performance of Bach's Chaconne, which forms the heart of the album, is something that warms into gloriousness. For the most part, Ticcianti's interpretation is careful and inconsistently persuasive in its rhetoric. He is most strong when 'improvisation' and 'breath' return to the narrative: the ethereal spinning and ghostly bariolage, for

example, illuminates moments where Bach's writing needn't be so monumental or grand. Yet it is a monument, and so it pains me to say: Bach's Chaconne doesn't fit here. It is selfish in what it takes from the pieces that surround it, trading the corporeal flesh of dance for cerebral intensity (in this interpretation at least), and interrupts what is otherwise an impeccable sense of flow between works. The meditative presence generated by the three improvisations - 'Ground', 'Being', and 'Breath' - threatens to be undone by the Bach. Which is a shame, as these improvisations are special indeed. We are immersed in an elemental landscape in which, honestly, I'm not entirely sure what I'm listening to: violin harmonics transform into gleaming streaks of percussion, Gareth Lubbe's harmonic singing spills into the resonance of something plucked, perhaps bowed. O/Modernt improvise music that flows between the performers' bodies as if it were the oxygen that they share. That this 'music' then feeds the very ground upon which we stand - CD sales are donated to the WWF forests initiative - is not only a charming pun on the chaconne, but makes the circle whole: this is music that comes from the earth given back to the earth.

Particular mention must go to the stunning performances of the three percussionists on the album: Nora Thiele's omnipresent generosity and rhythmic support, Leandro Mancini-Olivos's drums that drip with cool, and Elsa Bradley's electric playing in Johannes Marmén's *Inside One Breath* that induces panic even in the hardest of listeners. Mancini-Olivos is the glue that makes the three Purcell remixes that close the album so slick. In these, Shakespearean verse and Baba Israel's spoken word (evocative improvisations such as 'her touch rises my spirit as we walk through streets expanding like maps') are imaginatively superimposed on the harmonic and rhythmic patterns of Purcell. Henrik Måwe's piano-playing in Dido's Lament - which has more than a hint of 'Where is the love?' by Black Eyed Peas, that smash hit of 2003 - sparkles with the freedom of a summer in New York. But, to quote Baba Israel, 'even that is too flowery ... there are no words that can capture your rapture'. So put on the kettle, give this disc a spin, and maybe in under an hour you'll also be booking flights to Kathmandu: whatever Ticcianti's drinking, I want some too.

Mark Seow

'London circa 1700, Vol 1'

'Purcell & his Generation'

Blow Ground in G minor **Croft** Sonata in F

Draghi Sonata in G minor **Finger** A Ground in

D minor. Sonata seconda. Suite in D minor

D Purcell Sonata terza. Sonata sexta **H Purcell**

Sonatas - No 3, Z792; No 6, Z807

La Rêveuse / Florence Bolton, Benjamin Perrot

Mirare © MIR368 (70' • DDD)



To my ears there's a subtle French perfume lingering over the opening

to this Restoration London-themed programme from *La Rêveuse*; perhaps a nod to how Charles II's exile-years experiences at the court of his 'Sun King' cousin Louis XIV influenced his own subsequent regeneration of English court musical life.

Versailles-tinted Purcell or not, the opening work to which I refer is Henry Purcell's three-part Sonata No 3 in D minor, published in 1683, two years before Charles's death. While on the one hand *La Rêveuse*'s bright-toned reading achieves the 'gravity' Purcell himself was after - via subtly detached articulation and with the harpsichord flourishes relatively far back behind the strings - the not-so-grave elements are equally striking. Take the dramatically accentuated hairpin dynamics, or indeed just the overall luxuriousness of tone. It's an enjoyable halfway house between the more detached articulation and sparer acoustic of Beznosiuk, Podger, Coin and Hogwood's elegant recording and The King's Consort's much more sombre-toned, slower and fuller-sounding offering which has opted for organ over harpsichord.

The ensuing programme (which later brings in its own organ) then brings us the fizzing, multicoloured story of the English Restoration musical scene - one that notably saw the birth of the first commercial public concerts as composers established ways to earn their daily crust without court patronage, and saw the rise of the recorder and violin as respected solo instruments - via the works of Daniel Purcell (Henry's younger brother), Gottfried Finger, Giovanni Battista Draghi, John Blow and William Croft.

Musicological standouts include the eight-section manuscript Sonata in G minor by the Theatre Royal's Italian repetiteur and keyboardist, Draghi: one



A shopping list for loveliness: Hugo Ticciati leads a varied collection of musicians in tracing the allure of the chaconne from its South American origins

of the first sonatas for two treble instruments (violins) composed on British soil. Another treat is Finger's Ground in D minor, which, while regularly programmed in isolation, is heard here within its original context as the final movement of his Suite in D minor, with the added draw of Bolton's seven-string bass viol poking particularly clearly and attractively through the textures: a reminder that, while Sébastien Marq's direct-toned recorder may be the star of the show, it was the bass viol that was closest to Finger's own heart. All in all, a lovely disc.

Charlotte Gardner

'Out of Italy'

Antoniotto Sonata, Op 1 No 8 **Boccherini** Sonata, G17 **Cervetto** Divertimento, Op 4 No 1 **Cirri** Duetto, Op 8 No 3 **Geminiani** Sonata, Op 5 No 5 **Lanzetti** Sonata, Op 1 No 5 **Vivaldi** Sonata No 6, RV46
Phoebe Carrai, Beiliang Zhu vcs
Charles Weaver lute **Avi Stein** hpd
Avie © AV2394 (72' • DDD)



One of the many pleasures of this recording of Italian music for Baroque cello is hearing Beiliang Zhu play student/teacher duos with cellist Phoebe Carrai, one of the tutors under whom she received her Master of Music from the Juilliard School. It lends not just an extra layer of authenticity; whether it's a divertimento by Cervetto, a sonata by Boccherini or a duetto by Cirri, a mutual affection, warmth and sense of intimacy shines through in these sometimes virtuoso but mostly fun pieces. (The Boccherini is quite marvellous: picturesque, colourful and full of surprises.)

Such qualities also abound in the sonatas, where the two are joined by Charles Weaver on theorbo and Avi Stein on harpsichord. Taking turns as soloist and continuo player from work to work, Carrai and Zhu mark the air

much as calligraphers would paper, lively *détaché* passages contrasting with longer, swelling bow strokes and tapering lines – all enlivened by tasteful ornamentation.

As Reinhard Goebel writes in his brief booklet note, many Italian composers – including all those here, hence the recording's title – chose to leave their native soil for greener grasses: 'Geminiani went to London; Boccherini to Madrid ... Even Vivaldi – by then in his 60s – left his familiar Venice behind for Dresden, though he never made it that far, dying in Vienna in 1741.'

This fact may not have much impact on the actual music presented here but it's a nice way to curate a recital, as it tells a story. With Weaver and Stein as sensitive and creative musical partners, Zhu and Carrai do just that: tell delightful stories. **William Yeoman**

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Mario Del Monaco

The famed Otello, known for brashness both of voice and of character, had a huge talent. Hugo Shirley urges potential doubters to listen more carefully to uncover his hidden gifts

I started singing in taverns at 15 lire a time, and now I am the highest-paid tenor in the world.' Arthur Jacobs's interview with Mario Del Monaco (1915-82) in these pages (August 1962) makes for fascinating reading. Not only is the Florence-born tenor candid about his fees (refreshingly un-British, Jacobs suggests), but also invites his interviewer to feel his biceps ('hard', he reports) and to engage in a trial of strength. One gets the sense of a genial encounter at the Savoy Hotel, but one where Del Monaco might have turned at any moment, bursting into a rage worthy of his most famous character, Verdi's Otello.

Such confidence and machismo are hardly surprising for anyone familiar with Del Monaco's many recordings. This tenor – perhaps the last of his robust breed – is as famous as much for his immediately recognisable trumpeting tone as for his interpretative inflexibility. As John Steane put it in *The Grand Tradition* (1974): 'It seemed that if this was the indispensable heroic tenor of our days, then our days had better learn a little stoicism or keep a hand on the volume control.' Nevertheless, Del Monaco stands proud and loud at the heart of recorded opera of the early LP era, with two dozen studio recordings of operas for Decca to his name and, of course, countless live recordings charting an international career that spanned almost three decades. Most of us can only imagine what a thrilling sound he must have made in the theatre.

For Decca he formed part of a regular team with the soprano Renata Tebaldi and the baritone Ettore Bastianini (profiled as an Icon by Mark Pullinger in April), who – along with many of the great mezzos and basses of the 1950s and early 1960s – provided us with recordings of much of the core repertoire which were of rare vocal robustness and richness. Despite his association

with Tebaldi in the studio, Del Monaco also made several important appearances opposite Maria Callas – among them a live *Andrea Chénier* at La Scala in 1955 and a famously rip-roaring live *Aida* from Mexico City in 1951.

His repertoire, covering some 40 roles, was broad and adventurous. Beyond the Italian staples he sang Enée in

Les Troyens (the great mezzo Giulietta Simionato thought he was ideally cast in the role) as well as Wagner – extracts of him singing Siegmund in Act 1 of *Die Walküre* (in relatively decent

German) reveal it to have been far from a mismatch.

The voice – constructed of big steely girders of ever-reliable tone – seems to have been built on an astonishing natural gift. A local newspaper review described him aged just 13 or 14 (sources vary) as 'a phenomenal young singer who in the not too distant future will develop into an artist with a mighty voice'. But this huge gift proved difficult for teachers to come to terms with: none lasted long (one apparently was dismissed by having the score of Donizetti's *La favorita* hurled at his head), with Del Monaco opting to manage his talents in his

own way. 'My method', he admitted to *Opera* in 1962, 'is a very controversial one.' Throughout his career he was aware of the strengths and limitations of his singing – no doubt revelling in the former, but poring over recordings of himself (made on a collection of tape recorders) to try to address the latter, apparently at times frustrated at how little nuance his 'controversial' home-made technique would allow.

Today's listeners might feel similar frustrations, but careful listening can reveal sensitivity to complement the decibels. His 'Vesti la giubba' on the Decca *Pagliacci* conducted by Francesco Molinari-Pradelli is distinguished by a subtle, moving rubato, and there are moments of vulnerability among the thrills in his

The voice – constructed of steely girders of ever-reliable tone – seems to have been built on an astonishing natural gift

DEFINING MOMENTS

•1940 – *March 20*

Del Monaco makes his professional debut as Turiddu (*Cavalleria rusticana*) at the Teatro Comunale, Cagli.

•1950 – *July; and November 27*

He makes his debut as Otello in Buenos Aires, and later that year makes his Metropolitan Opera debut as Puccini's Des Grieux.

•1962 – *June 30*

He sings Otello at Covent Garden, returning to London for the first time after his debut there 16 years previously.

•1975 – *Official retirement from the stage*

He makes his final appearance as Canio in Vienna on May 1. Seven years later, on October 16, 1982, he dies at Mestre, near Venice, aged 67 – and is buried in his Otello costume.

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Verdi Otello

Renata Tebaldi *sop* Aldo Protti *bar* et al;
Vienna State Opera Chorus; Vienna
Philharmonic / Herbert von Karajan
Decca (10/61)

This thrilling studio recording from 1961 captures Del Monaco at his very best in his signature role.



PHOTOGRAPHY: BRIDGEMAN IMAGES

outstanding *La fanciulla del West* with Tebaldi (conducted by Franco Capuana). But his greatest achievement on disc remains for me his second studio *Otello*, with Herbert von Karajan putting a fire in the belly of the Vienna Philharmonic to match the temperament of his protagonist. ‘No other tenor – in this role as well as in many others – had the vocal splendour and the irresistible strength of Mario Del Monaco,’

Tebaldi (the Desdemona) said of her colleague in 1979, and it’s difficult to disagree. There’s impetuosity and occasionally impatience, but one gets the sense of the character’s own emotions always running ahead of him, of Del Monaco the actor constantly having to be held in check by Del Monaco the singer. The result is uniquely thrilling and, ultimately, moving. ‘Ecco il leone’ indeed! ⑥

Instrumental



Harriet Smith welcomes compelling Messiaen from Martin Helmchen:

'Helmchen is scrupulous about gradations of sound and even the loudest moments are never percussive' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 66](#)



Lindsay Kemp hears Sophie Yates play Fitzwilliam harpsichord music:

'Yates plays an early 17th-century harpsichord by Boni, a crisp, full-throated and deep-coloured beauty' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 70](#)

CPE Bach

'Abschied'

Fantasias - Wq58 No 7 H278; Wq59: No 5 H279; No 6 H284; Wq61 No 6 H291; Wq67 H300. Rondos - Wq56 No 5 H262; Wq57 No 1 H265; Wq58 No 1 H276; Wq59 No 4 H283; Wq61 No 4 H290; 'Abschied von meinem Silbermannischen Claviere', Wq66 H272. Variations on 'La folia d'Espagne', Wq118 No 9 H263

Vittorio Forte *pf*

Odradek (E) ODRCD368 (79' • DDD)



For his new Odradek recording, the Calabrian pianist Vittorio Forte has

chosen a programme of fantasies, rondos and variations written in Hamburg during the last decade of Emanuel Bach's life. The mercurial moods of the master of *Empfindsamkeit*, who is also arguably among the earliest important composers for the piano, are not easily rendered on the modern Steinway. Forte's heartfelt and resourceful playing succeeds admirably.

The E minor Rondo, *Farewell to my Silbermann Clavichord*, was written when Bach relinquished his favourite clavichord to his pupil Ewald von Grotthuss in 1781. Published as recently as 1986, the Rondo's wistful sadness will doubtless touch the heart of any keyboard player whose instrument has become a close confidante through the years. Another gem, first published in 1938, is the *La folia* Variations from 1778. Drawing on Bach's deep reservoir of inventive figuration, this audaciously original treatment of *La folia* is a late 18th-century tour de force. Without forcing or overstatement, Forte's interpretation glows with imagination and virtuosity.

The F sharp minor Fantasia, at 11 minutes the longest piece on the disc, seems to touch on all the styles that Bach inherited or anticipated in a seamless tapestry. Listening to Forte's poetic reading, it is easy to understand both why Bach was so admired by Haydn

and how he remained a strong influence on Beethoven.

Adventurous listeners eager for a detour from the beaten path, not to mention connoisseurs of thoughtful piano-playing of cultivated sensitivity, won't want to miss this. **Patrick Rucker**

JS Bach

'The Complete Works for Keyboard, Vol 2 - Towards the North'

JS Bach Ach Gott und Herr, BWV714^a. Ach Herr, mich armen Sünder, BWV742^b. Allein zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ, BWV1100^c. Als Jesus Christus in der Nacht, BWV1108^a. Canzona, BWV588^c. Christ, der du bist der helle Tag, BWV1120^a. Christ lag in Todesbanden, BWV718^b. Du Friedefürst, Herr Jesu Christ, BWV1102^a. Durch Adams Fall ist ganz verderbt, BWV1101^a. Erbarm dich mein, o Herre Gott, BWV721^a. Fantasia super 'Valet will ich dir geben', BWV735a^b. Fantasie duobus subjectis, BWV917^c. Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott, BWV720^b. Fugues - 'Thema Legrenzianum', BWV574b^b; BWV575^b; BWV577^b; BWV578^b; on a Theme of Corelli, BWV579^b; BWV955a^c; BWV959^c. Gott ist mein Heil, mein Hilf und Trost, BWV1106^a. Herr Christ, der einig Gottes Sohn, BWV Anh55^b. Herzliebster Jesu, was hast du verbrochen, BWV1093^a. In dich hab ich gehoffet, Herr, BWV712^a. Jesu, meines Lebens Leben, BWV1107^b. Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier, BWV754^b. O Herre Gott, dein göttlich Wort, BWV1110^a. O Lamm Gottes unschuldig - BWV1085^c; BWV1095^a. Partite diverse sopra 'Christ, der du bist der helle Tag', BWV766^c. Partite diverse sopra 'O Gott, du frommer Gott', BWV767^b. Prelude, BWV569^b. Preludes and Fugues - BWV532a^b; BWV566^b. Sonatas (after Reincken)^c: BWV965; BWV966 - Adagio. Der Tag, der ist so freudenreich, BWV719^c. Toccatas - BWV912a^b; BWV913a^c; BWV914^c. Vater unser im Himmelreich, BWV737^a. Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern, BWV739^b. Wir Christenleut, BWV1090^a. Wir glauben all an einen Gott - BWV765^a; BWV1098^c. **Buxtehude** Chorale Fantasia 'Nun freut euch, lieben Christen g'mein', BuxWV210^b. Fugue, BuxWV174^c. **Pachelbel** Fugue in B minor^b. Kyrie Gott Vater in Ewigkeit^b. Toccata in C^c. **Reincken** Chorale Fantasy 'An Wasser Flüssen Babylon'^b

Benjamin Alard ^borg/^{ac}claviorganum

^aGerlinde Sämman ^{sop}

Harmonia Mundi (S) (4) HMM90 2435/6 (4h 24' • DDD • T)

^bPlayed on the Freytag-Tricoteaux organ (2001) after Arp Schnitger, Church of St Vaast, Béthune, France



In 1700, the 15-year-old Johann Sebastian Bach left behind his native Thuringia

and travelled to Luneberg, in the north of Germany, where he studied, sang, developed his talents on the organ and made the acquaintance of some of the leading musical figures of the day. Hamburg was close enough that he could visit there, too, with its opera house and cosmopolitan musical life. French Huguenot composers, fleeing religious strife, had brought the latest keyboard fashions to the region, which he absorbed through his encounters with Georg Böhm. And the local musical culture meant steady exposure to Pachelbel, Buxtehude and Reincken.

Benjamin Alard continues his revelatory complete keyboard works series with four discs that explore this new milieu, which had such a powerful impact on Bach's musical style. 'Towards the North', the second instalment of this beautifully played and produced series, explores the years 1705-08; and like the first it includes music not just by Bach but by the composers who influenced him. So we have a steady, sensible reading of Reincken's magisterial chorale fantasy *An Wasser Flüssen Babylon*, a theme on which Bach would extemporise a legendary improvisation years later, when he was a master of equal standing to his aged predecessor.

The works of Bach in this period are, like those heard on the first volume, a motley assemblage, reflecting his growing skill, his absorptive talent, his occasional clumsy efforts and his nascent mastery, which one hears in the early toccatas



Heartfelt and resourceful: Vittorio Forte conveys the mercurial moods of CPE Bach's piano music

included on the fourth and last disc of the set.

One of the great pleasures of these discs, beyond Alard's smooth renditions and clarifying fingerwork, is his choice of instruments, in particular a claviorganum built in 2009-10. The combination of the harpsichord's sharp ictus and the organ's mellow and sustained tone gives his renditions of early chorale arrangements both linear fluidity and tonal richness, a sharply etched chamber-music sound that fits their four-part texture perfectly. The soprano Gerlinde Sämman sings the chorale lines with simplicity and a pleasant tone, underlying the musical source material and adding to the chamber-music fullness of the presentation.

Alard's playing is rhythmically free, fleet and unpretentious, and, once again – even if this collection feels a bit like preparatory material for the main event to come – it leaves one eagerly anticipating Alard's arrival at Bach's second Weimar period, with its explosion of keyboard riches.

Philip Kennicott

JS Bach

Das wohltemperirte Clavier, Book 2, BWV870-93

Céline Frisch *hpd*

Alpha Ⓢ (two discs for the price of one) ALPHA451 (146' • DDD)



With Book 2, Céline Frisch completes her traversal of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, maintaining the stylishly high standards and cultivated musicianship informing her recording of Book 1 (4/16). She uses a harpsichord built by Andrea Restelli, based upon a 1738-vintage Christian Vater model, that conveys equal doses of power and delicacy, if not necessarily the last word in sheer timbral allure (ie the Richard Egarr, John Butt, Christine Schornsheim and Kenneth Gilbert cycles).

By and large Frisch favours animated tempos and avoids the fussy agogic phrasings other harpsichordists routinely trot out in the name of authenticity, save for one or two lapses, such as in the G sharp minor Prelude and Fugue. She employs rubato and rhythmic inflection with the utmost discretion and sense of purpose; for example, her slightly elongated down-beats in the C major Prelude illuminate important harmonic junctures to uplifting effect.

Perhaps the most revealing examples of Frisch's finger independence and bracing

articulation can be found in the uncommonly clear interplay of voices in C sharp major Prelude and in the G minor Fugue's close-lying counterpoint. Subtle contrasts between legato and detached fingerwork bring shapely variety to the C sharp minor Fugue, so much so that the fast tempo sounds not at all rushed. A similar approach imparts much-needed contrast and colour to the B flat minor Fugue's relentlessly chromatic harmonic motion.

The F minor Prelude stands out for Frisch's thematic characterisation and flexible, conversational phrasing. She offsets her austere deliberation in the ricercar-like E major Fugue by way of unexpected ornaments. And rather than treat the G major Prelude as a toccata or a finger exercise, Frisch instead emphasises the music's cross-rhythmic accents and implied inner melodies without overdoing them.

Frisch may not supersede tried-and-true modern day reference versions of the '48' from such disparate artists as Christophe Rousset, Masaaki Suzuki, Davitt Moroney, Blandine Verlet and the aforementioned Gilbert (my sonic/interpretative paradigm), yet she's unquestionably a strong contender in a crowded field.

Jed Distler

Frescobaldi

Toccate e partite d'intavolatura
di cimbalo, libro primo

Christophe Rousset *hpd*

Aparté Ⓢ AP202 (78' • DDD)



Frescobaldi's first book of *Toccate e partite d'intavolatura di cimbalo* (1615)

was published in Rome during his first stint as organist at St Peter's – although Christophe Rousset's selection of pieces draws from an enlarged later edition (1637) that includes extra balletti, passacaglias and chaconnes, as well as variations that had been added to an intervening reprint in 1628. He compares Frescobaldi's 'strange harmonies, painful dissonances, and subtly drawn melodic lines' to Caravaggio and Gentileschi, and accordingly his beguiling playing exploits the vividness of an anonymous and lavishly painted late 16th-century harpsichord (extended in range in 1736 but now restored by David Ley to its original state). Nowhere is the marriage of sensational instrument and perceptive musician more apparent than in Rousset's beguiling playing of the colossal *Cento partite sopra passacagli* – an 11-minute tour de force bursting with daring chromaticism.

Rousset's experienced interpretations display an unerring sense of contrapuntal direction that conveys madrigalian freedom and soulful melodicism; for example, the melancholic sixth toccata that wrings out every spicy nuance of the instrument's historical tuning. Extended variations on an aria 'della Romanesca', an aria 'di Monica' and an energetic galliard ('La follia') are performed with sure-footed rhythmical fantasy and dexterous virtuosity. This superbly engineered album is an enriching alternative to a complete account of the entire collection (in its 1637 form) by Rinaldo Alessandrini (Arcana), who also explores the title-page's suggestion of using either harpsichord or organ as the player desires. **David Vickers**

Liszt

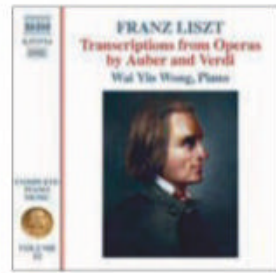
'Complete Piano Music, Vol 52 –

Transcriptions from Operas by Auber and Verdi' Concert Paraphrase on a Operatic Theme (Verdi, 'Ernani'), S431a. Grande fantasia sur la tyrolienne de l'opéra 'La fiancée' (Auber), S385 (first and third versions). Salve Maria de 'Jérusalem' (Verdi, 'I Lombardi'), S431 (second version). Drei Stücke aus der Oper 'La muette de Portici' (Auber), S387 – No 1, Introduction (Prière); No 2, Cavatine (Berceuse). Tarantelle di bravura

d'après la tarantelle de 'La muette de Portici' (Auber), S386 (two versions). Tyrolean Melody (Auber, 'La fiancée'), S385a

Wai Yin Wong *pf*

Naxos Ⓢ 8 573714 (76' • DDD)



When faced with a body of work as prodigious as Liszt's piano music, a

lexicographic approach must be tempting. In this 52nd volume of Naxos's complete series, we are confronted with two versions, back to back, of the Tarantella from *La muette de Portici*, along with the Prayer and Cavatina from the same opera, and three versions of the Tyrolean melody from *La fiancée*, all based on Auber. Leavening is provided by one of the two settings of the Salve Maria from *Jérusalem* (the French version of *I Lombardi*) and one of the Concert Paraphrases on *Ernani*, based on Verdi.

Compensation for this rather stultifying programming is the excellent piano-playing of Wai Yin Wong. Following studies in her native Hong Kong, Wong did postgraduate work in the US at Peabody and Yale. If a greater sense of drama might be brought to these performances, Wong's clarity, innate musicality and technical mastery are nonetheless impressive.

Alongside Leslie Howard's capacious Liszt series on Hyperion, the Naxos project of recording all the piano music with various pianists is a worthy one. Thus far the Naxos Complete Piano Works contains some indisputable gems. With significant stretches of repertoire still outstanding, the series could profit by more stringent and discerning programming. Liszt's transcriptions and fantasies form a unique realm of 19th-century piano music, both in quality and quantity, one which has been historically under-recorded. Surely they warrant the sort of imaginative programming oversight that will show them in their best light. **Patrick Rucker**

Liszt • Lyapunov

Liszt Études d'exécution transcendente, S139

Lyapunov Études d'exécution transcendente, Op 11

Konstantin Scherbakov *pf*

Steinway & Sons Ⓢ Ⓢ STNS30098 (138' • DDD)



Scherbakov is a pianist I have long admired, a superb technician with a wide-ranging and

adventurous repertoire. His more than 40 CDs include a unique complete set of all Godowsky's works. This latest release is also unique, for it is the first time that anyone has thought to couple Liszt's *Transcendental Études* with Lyapunov's complementary set.

So it gives me no pleasure to report that the result is a disappointment. Partly the trouble is the small acoustic, which does not allow the piano to truly sing. On the plus side, in both sets you get exemplary voicing, textual clarity and fidelity. But you never feel that Scherbakov is exploiting the full dynamic range of the instrument. Unusually for him, the playing is studio-safe and somewhat literal.

The opening bars of the Preludio (Liszt's Étude No 1) set the scene. It is marked *energico* – and you might well think, coming new to the work, that it is indeed played energetically. But turn to one of the benchmark recordings (Lazar Berman, either in the 1959 mono version or the 1963 stereo remake) and you are swept into a tumultuous maelstrom. *Molto vivace* is the marking for Étude No 2, and Berman obliges with swashbuckling aplomb. Scherbakov allows tension to evaporate with fractional pauses for breath. Listen to how Berman storms home. Overwhelming. Comparative tempos illustrate the two different approaches: 'Feux follets' – Berman 3'23", Scherbakov 4'03"; 'Wilde Jagd' – Berman 4'32", Scherbakov 5'42" (hardly Liszt's *presto furioso*).

Scherbakov is only the second pianist to record the complete set of Lyapunov's *Transcendental Studies* twice, following in the steps of Louis Kentner, whose first account (1949; APR, 11/16) remains the benchmark. Strangely, it is both pianists' first versions that are vastly preferable to their second attempts. In fact, I would place Scherbakov's 1993 recording (Marco Polo, 4/94) a close second to Kentner ahead of more recent recordings by Vincenzo Maltempo and Etsuko Hirose. This new recording suffers from the same dry sound as the Liszt pieces; and while tempos and character are far more convincing in the Lyapunov, I find it puzzling when comparing both Scherbakov performances of, for instance, No 6, 'Tempête', and No 10, 'Lesghinka', that the piano sings and thunders on the Marco Polo disc – the kind of playing, in short, that we have come to expect from Scherbakov – while on the Steinway disc he is uncharacteristically reserved. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Messiaen

Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus

Martin Helmchen *pf*

Alpha Ⓢ (two discs for the price of one) ALPHA423 (130' • DDD)



What can you do to prepare for Messiaen's *Vingt Regards*? Martin Helmchen has largely dedicated himself to the classic Austrian-German repertoire up to now – his only previous foray into French music on disc being d'Indy's *Symphonie sur un chant montagnard français*. He recorded *Vingt Regards* in Berlin's Christuskirche in 2014, so I wonder why it has taken five years to see the light of day.

From the off, there's a palpable sense of concentration, which is an absolutely key aspect of this piece, and he finds a palette of many colours within the subdued dynamics of the first Regard. It's also paced just so, which makes the rude awakening of the second Regard all the more dramatic. Throughout the cycle Helmchen is always scrupulous about gradations of sound and even the loudest moments never threaten to become percussive.

He is also a secure guide in the way he elucidates the main themes out of which Messiaen forms his *Vingt Regards* – the chordal 'Theme of God' initially heard in the first piece, the tumultuous 'Theme of the Star and of the Cross' presented in the

second and the 'Theme of Chords' which occurs again and again in various ways.

But as well as his intellectual grasp of the piece, Helmchen is also alive to its sensuality, whether in the guileless No 4, combining innocence and delicacy, or the 11th Regard, which seems to stop time, building the dynamics up in a great arc and then falling away again, the filigree ideally judged. The fifth is another highlight, opening with a sense of desolation against which the slowed-down Theme of God chords sound wonderfully nurturing, and the point when the birdsong twitters around those chords is raptly done.

In No 13, with its evocation of pealing Christmas bells, Helmchen spices blatant joy with something more troubling, a kind of obsessive quality. The following Regard evoking the gaze of the Angels is glitteringly lit, with the final crescendo cut off with due drama, leaving the music suspended. The penultimate Regard is again a masterclass in tenderness, helping to create a very human reading.

But in order for Messiaen's sense of contemplation and gentleness to be fully felt the interpreter also needs to conjure a sense of the extremes, whether these are joyous or terrifying. I find the 10th Regard, for instance, slightly tentative, particularly compared with the Ligetian brilliance of

Aimard in the toccata opening. This means that when Aimard reaches the Theme of Joy itself, it stands in great contrast, whereas Helmchen is less intoxicatingly incense-laden.

In the 15th Regard – 'The Kiss of the Infant Jesus' – Helmchen's way with the chordal theme is very beautiful. But Osborne is slower, more entrancing still, almost stopping time. Aimard is a little self-consciously studied here by comparison.

But perhaps the most potent example comes when you compare the three players in the final Regard, the 'Gaze of the Church of Love'. Both Aimard and Osborne are frankly awesome in their vision of unfettered power. That's not simply down to sheer dynamics, for the way Helmchen sets a marching bass line against fraught expostulations high in the right hand are very potent; it's more about the sense of extremes, in which you feel as if the music itself is becoming dangerously unhinged.

Caveats aside, though, it's always gratifying to have another fine recording of this extraordinarily potent masterpiece, still as fresh as ever in its 75th-birthday year. The recording engineers have done a fantastic job for Helmchen, catching him in a lifelike acoustic. And the luminously ethereal Klee painting that adorns the CD



audite

(Lucchesini's) performances are superb – an intensity at one with exquisiteness...
Sunday Times

ANDREA LUCCHESINI
SCHUBERT: LATE PIANO WORKS



audite 97.765 | Distributor UK: RSK Entertainment



cover made me long for the era of proper-sized LP sleeves. **Harriet Smith**

Selected comparisons:

Aimard (4/00) (TELD) 3984 26868-2

Osborne (10/02) (HYPE) CDA67351/2

Mompou

'Restart'

Cançons i danses – excs. Impresiones intimas – excs. Música callada – No 1, Angelico; No 28, Lento. Paisajes. El plany del captaire

Caspar Vos *pf*

7 Mountain Ⓢ 7MNTN016 (76' • DDD)



There could hardly be more contrast between Caspar Vos's first two solo discs: from the

dense forests of Medtner (6/18) he now transports us to the bare landscapes of Frederic Mompou, replacing oil paint, as it were, with washed-out watercolour.

The piano sound is pleasant and warm throughout – far more so than Martin Jones's Mompou survey on Nimbus, for example. And despite a leaning towards slow tempos, Vos never loses sight of smooth voicing, savouring each note in all its infinite beauty and meaning. There are moments, in particular in the Cançon sections of *Cançons i danses*, when the pervasive rubatos and rhythmic stretchings verge on predictability, but Vos's sensitivity and affinity for the music come to the rescue.

Compared to Mompou's own account of *Cançons i danses* – so full of Mediterranean light and flavours – Vos's approach is notably soft-lens. True, these are meant to be memories of dances rather than actual ones, but who said the sun can't shine in the land of memories? There is also a more rhetorical quality to Alicia de Larrocha's take on the *Impresiones intimas*, providing a mid-point between Vos's melancholy and Mompou's relative angularity.

Vos has evidently made his selection from Mompou's output with his own poetic temperament and sound in mind. By contrast, Volodos's brilliance suits a programme that traces the composer's stylistic evolution and embraces other facets of his personality. Volodos also offers a thrilling and markedly more dramatic interpretation than Vos of 'El llac' ('El lago'), the second piece of the *Paisajes* set, all of which may be found on Stephen Hough's acclaimed Mompou disc. Hough, too, covers a more varied repertoire than Vos, in a carefully designed programme that eschews chronology in favour of aesthetic and poetic connections. 7 Mountain

Records' recorded sound for Vos certainly has the edge over Hyperion's but Hough's poetic and moving booklet note greatly enhances the listening experience, also providing background information that is largely absent from the accompanying essay by Isabella Vos. **Michelle Assay**

Cançons i danses, Impresiones intimas – selected comparison:

Larrocha (4/84^R) (DECC) Ⓢ 483 2901

Cançons i danses – selected comparisons:

Hough (9/97) (HYPE) CDA66963

Mompou (1/99) (ENSA) Ⓢ ENYCD9725

El llac – selected comparison:

Volodos (8/13) (SONY) 88883 71044-2

Mozart

Piano Sonatas – No 2, K280; No 3, K281;

No 8, K310; No 13, K333

Lars Vogt *pf*

Ondine Ⓢ ODE1318-2 (74' • DDD)



Mozart poses formidable challenges for modern pianists. Late 18th-century

Viennese pianos resemble our contemporary instruments only on the most basic mechanical level. The way the hammers are triggered to strike the string has evolved almost beyond recognition, as have the hammers and strings themselves. Mozart's instrument had already undergone half a century of rapid technological development and its hegemony over other keyboards was well under way. But many of its celebrated attributes – among them clarity of sound, rich overtones, light touch and distinctive registers – would eventually disappear as pianos evolved towards greater power and stability. Today the pianist seeking to deliver some plausible representation of Mozart's musical imagination on a modern instrument must do so with a fearless blend of compromise, adjustment and conjury.

Lars Vogt certainly possesses these qualities, all presumably enriched by his recent experiences as a conductor. He has recorded two pairs of Mozart piano concertos (Oehms, 9/09; AVI, 3/14) and a selection of violin sonatas with Christian Tetzlaff (Ondine, 2/13), and this new release is a welcome return to the solo works after his early set for EMI (8/06).

In the A minor Sonata, K310, tragic power is wed to fragile grace in a thoughtful and disturbing performance. The insistent drive of the *Allegro maestoso* never loses sight of the telling detail. Juxtaposition of *fortissimo* and *pianissimo* in the development, so rare in Mozart, is given its full due. The *Andante cantabile*

presents a bouquet of detailed articulation, all of it supporting an inherent rhetorical logic. The concluding *Presto* is as harrowing a flight from the furies as one is likely to encounter, evoking panic only scarcely controlled.

Contrasts are also prevalent in the happier climes of the B flat Sonata, K281. From the elaborately embellished staking out of the principal tonality in the opening *Allegro*, ingratiating humour is always eager to assert itself. One could call the tenderness of the leisurely *Andante amoroso* childlike were it not so sophisticated, while the Rondo seems to burst any remaining constraints from indulgence in unalloyed joy.

This is richly communicative Mozart-playing, capturing a youthfulness touched with wisdom and undergirded by one of the most sensitive left hands around today. Experiencing it is akin to having made a new friend. **Patrick Rucker**

Schubert

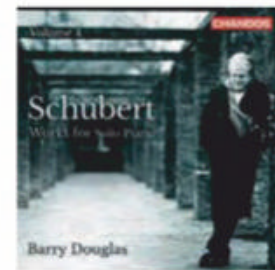
'Works for Solo Piano, Vol 4'

Piano Sonatas – No 5, D537;

No 9, D575; No 13, D664

Barry Douglas *pf*

Chandos Ⓢ CHAN20086 (69' • DDD)



Barry Douglas's Schubert series for Chandos has so far presented a blend of

forms, including sonatas, character pieces and a fantasy, with a peppering of Liszt song transcriptions. Vol 4, by contrast, focuses on three sonatas composed between 1817 and 1819, a period encompassing Schubert's return to live with his family and resumption of his teaching duties, his tenure with the Esterházy family at Zseliz and his travels with Vogl in Upper Austria.

The B major Sonata, D575, posing the greatest interpretative challenges of these sonatas, is here least satisfying. The first movement sounds tentative, as though Douglas is not quite sure what to make of Schubert's admittedly mercurial mood and wide-ranging tonal explorations. When the E minor episode of the slow movement erupts into *fortissimo* left-hand octaves supported by right-hand chords, they are hammered out uniformly, without regard to the hierarchy of beats in the measure or contour of line. Later, in the finale, dynamic differentiation strikes as ambiguous. The contrasts between *fortissimo* and *pianissimo* are small and, on occasion, *mezzo-fortes* are construed as *fortissimos*, factors which affect a

performance that overall seems lacking in decisiveness, cohesion and direction.

In the lovely A major Sonata, Douglas takes the *Allegro moderato* very broadly indeed, transforming the movement's pert freshness into maudlin sentimentality. A sort of soggy begins to set in, underscored by the tendency to slow up at the end of phrases and sections, a characteristic discernible throughout these performances. The lyrical *Andante*, where one longs for depth of sentiment, comes off as curiously affectless. The finale treads with a heavy foot, burgeoning joy replaced with a sense of duty. Unfortunately the engineers have done Douglas's sound no favours. **Patrick Rucker**

Wild

'The Complete Transcriptions and Original Piano Works, Vol 3'

Churchill Reminiscences of Snow White

Gershwin Fantasy on Porgy and Bess **Handel**

The Harmonious Blacksmith, HWV430 No 4

Saint-Saëns Le rouet d'Omphale, Op 31

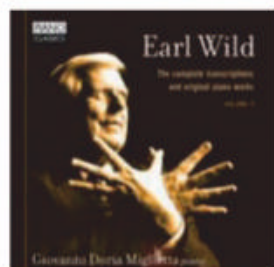
Tchaikovsky At the Ball, Op 38 No 3. Swan

Lake - Dance of the Four Swans (all transcr Wild)

Wild Jarabe Tapatio

Giovanni Doria Miglietta *pf*

Piano Classics © PCL10175 (60' • DDD)



Earl Wild almost single-handedly revived the 19th-century tradition

of piano transcription. Today, the likes of Hamelin, Hough, Volodos and Katsaris have firmly re-established its place in the concert hall and on disc. Wild, at a time when it was quite unfashionable to do so, produced 'Fantasies on ...', 'Reminiscences on ...' in the manner of Liszt, Thalberg et al while employing every trick in the book learnt from the 20th-century transcriptions of Rachmaninov, Godowsky and Horowitz.

This third volume of Wild's complete transcriptions and piano works shows the breadth of his interest from Handel to Franck Churchill, whose score for the 1937 animated film *Snow White* received Wild's attention in 1995. The fugato treatment of the dwarves' song 'Heigh-ho' is alone worth the price of admission. I have never quite warmed to his *Fantasy on Porgy and Bess* (lasting nearly half an hour, to my mind it outstays its welcome by at least 10 minutes) but that's not to say I do not admire the ingenuity and assurance of the writing, not to mention the clever thematic combinations and sly quotes from other works.

GRAMOPHONE *talks to ...* *Lars Vogt*

The pianist discusses the pleasures and challenges of playing Mozart on a modern piano

Artur Schnabel famously described Mozart's piano sonatas as being 'too easy for children, too difficult for artists'. Is there merit in this?

I don't think I've ever felt that Mozart's sonatas are too easy. I guess when you're growing up you might find the musical language rather 'childlike' and innocent alongside, say, the overt virtuosity of Liszt, but the older you get the more you find this vision or memory of childhood – the sheer humour, wit and happiness, and some sadness of course – utterly moving. This representation of the purest emotions, which we sometimes seem to have lost touch with, appears to us as a miracle. But finding the tone for this music, not to mention the sometimes freakish technical difficulties (the first movement of K310, for example), is the ultimate challenge for any musician. There's a good reason why a lot of pianists avoid it completely.

What factors do you take into account when playing Mozart on a modern piano, which is quite unlike his own instrument?

In my view pianos of Mozart's time had a lot of disadvantages compared to modern pianos. Surely Mozart would have loved the newer instruments' ability to sustain sounds and connect the notes of singing lines more



intimately. But they also had a few advantages when it comes to his own music, particularly in clarity. When performing with other instruments especially, in chamber music or concertos, we need to be aware what the pianos of the time sounded like and adjust our playing accordingly. For example, over the years I have reduced my use of the sustaining pedal in Mozart, sometimes to close to none at all. Working with students I find there's hardly any music one can learn more from than Mozart: about phrasing, style, touch, harmony and shaping a line.

Is this the beginning of a complete survey of the piano sonatas?

I have somehow left that undecided. But given the incredible joy I had working on these masterpieces, and also the process of recording them in Cologne with an incredible team I've known for years (thanks to Stephan Schmidt and Michael Morawietz!), I could well imagine continuing this journey.

It's a brave man who takes on one of the greatest pianists of the last century in his own works. Comparisons may be odious but, in cases like this, are inevitable. If you have never heard Earl Wild in these pieces, you will be suitably wowed by the Italian for he is a formidable talent who clearly loves the music and revels in its challenges. Impressive as he is, though, in *Snow White* and *Porgy and Bess*, he cannot quite emulate Wild's technical ease, his light touch (and light pedal) and, not unimportantly, the mischievous, knowing twinkle behind the delivery.

The difference between the two is even more apparent in the extraordinary transcription of *Le rouet d'Omphale*, a fearsomely difficult elaboration of Saint-Saëns's own piano arrangement of his orchestral tone poem like Wagner's 'Spinning Chorus' on steroids. The

spinning figuration is held in the foreground by Miglietta, while to Wild, whose performance is more than a minute faster, it is mere colour and accompaniment to other voices. Miglietta brings the curtain down on this final volume with a suitably exuberant rendition of the *Mexican Hat Dance* – again, not quite up to the Master himself, but certainly masterly.

Jeremy Nicholas

Elly Ney

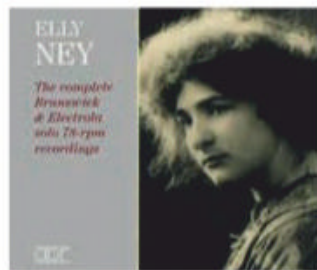
'The Complete Brunswick & Electrola Solo 78rpm Recordings'

Works by **Beethoven, Brahms, Carreño, Chopin, Debussy, Liszt, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Schubert, Schumann** and **R Strauss**

Elly Ney *pf*

APR © ③ APR7311 (3h 52' • ADD)

Recorded 1922-38



A student of Theodor Leschetizky and Liszt-pupil Emil von Sauer, the German pianist Elly Ney (1882-1968) enjoyed international success early in her career. By the mid-1930s Ney had become a staunch Nazi supporter, and her post-war activities remained essentially German-centric, along with her repertoire.

One would assume that a pianist known for playing Brahms's Second Concerto and late Beethoven would be something of a powerhouse. Yet Ney's 1934-38 solo and concerto recordings for the Electrola label generally reveal a smaller-scale artist. Her 1937 Beethoven Second Concerto with Fritz Zaun conducting is earthbound and matter-of-fact next to the more imaginatively inflected 1933 HMV Artur Schnabel traversal. Yet Ney and her husband, the conductor Willem van Hoogstraten, display great chamber-like rapport in Mozart's K450, notwithstanding stylistically antediluvian phrase-tapering and swoopy portamentos. In the pair's world-premiere recording of Strauss's *Burleske*, Ney's fingers are hard-pressed to keep up with her husband's rather optimistic tempos. Ney's Mozart A minor Rondo is new to CD, I believe, in a flippant, trivial performance that completely misses the point of Mozart's subtle harmonic sense and expressive depth.

Two Beethoven sonata performances (Opp 7 & 111) are strong on pointing up local details yet weak on dynamic contrast, cumulative force and conveying the sense of long line one hears in contemporaneous Beethoven recordings by interpreters as disparate as Schnabel, Backhaus, Kempff and Petri. Lyricism and intimacy, however, entirely befit her renditions of that composer's *Andante favori* and the WoO70 Variations, as well as her Schumann *Kinderszenen* and the best of her Schubert (the F minor Impromptu, D935 No 4) and Brahms (Op 117 No 1) traversals.

Appearing for the first time together on CD, to the best of my knowledge, Ney's 1922 acoustic Brunswick discs are a mixed bag, ranging from dull Chopin and Schubert to a lively Liszt *Hungarian Rhapsody* No 8 and the remarkably terse and textually honest recorded premiere of Debussy's 'Feux d'artifice'. Although I don't always agree with annotator Jonathan Summers's artistic conclusions, his research is beyond reproach, and so are the remasterings.

Jed Distler

'American Postcard'

Adams Roll Over Beethoven. Short Ride in a Fast Machine (both arr Antonsen) **Copland** El Salón México (arr Bernstein). Variations on a Shaker Melody (arr Lerner) **Nancarrow** Sonatina (arr Mikhashoff) **Schoenfield** Five Days from the Life of a Manic-Depressive

Christina and Michelle Naughton *pf*

Warner Classics © 9029 55622-9 (64' • DDD)



Most pianophiles, I suspect, have longstanding favourites among

piano ensembles. As a child I was smitten with Vronsky and Babin, Luboschutz and Nemenoff, and since then my enthusiasm for the medium hasn't really diminished. Through the years, a succession of wonderful duos – Argerich and Freire of course, Bresciani and Nicolosi, Egri and Pertis, and naturally the Labèque sisters and the Jussen brothers – have afforded tremendous pleasure. In recent seasons, however, my attention has been increasingly drawn to the American twin sisters Christina and Michelle Naughton, whose third commercial recording (their second for Warner), 'American Postcard', has just been released.

What makes them so compelling? Their musical culture is deep-seated and secure; graduates of both Curtis and Juilliard, they seem to have absorbed the best those institutions have to offer while escaping the worst. Both are master pianists: whether in moments of fearsome power or whispered calm, they never exceed the capacities of the instrument, remaining happily within the realm of beautiful, healthy sound. One particularly stunning aspect of their virtuosity is a rhythmic acuity that is incisive, precise and seemingly effortless. Enveloping it all is the Naughtons' ensemble ethos – a combination of shared kinaesthesia and unity of intent more varied, seasoned and richer than an entire boatload of musicians twice their age.

Fans of *Hallelujah Junction* in the Naughtons' last release (5/16) will be happy to know 'American Postcard' is anchored by a pair of John Adams pieces. First on the disc is the well-known 1986 orchestral work *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* in a brilliantly resourceful transcription by Preben Antonsen, the San Francisco-based composer and pianist. The penultimate cut is *Roll Over Beethoven*, actually a transcription of Adams's Second String Quartet (2015), also in Antonsen's superb re-conception for piano duet. Like *Absolute Jest*, Adams's concerto for string quartet

and orchestra, *Roll Over* riffs on 'fractals', or tiny isolated gestures, from Beethoven – in this case drawn from the Sonatas Opp 110 and 111 and the *Diabelli* Variations. The Naughtons' identification with the score's manic humour is infectious.

If these demonstrations of imagination and virtuosity weren't enough, there is Paul Schoenfield's *Five Days from the Life of a Manic-Depressive*, also filled with references to earlier musics, and Yvar Mikhashoff's 1986 transcription of Conlon Nancarrow's Sonatina, originally a solo work from the early 1940s. Two Copland pieces provide vivid contrast, Bernstein's transcription of *El Salón México* and a delicate, nostalgic scene from *Appalachian Spring*.

Both as fascinating programming and exhilarating piano-playing, this disc is a joy from beginning to end. The music-making of Christina and Michelle Naughton inspires hope at a time when we could sure use some. **Patrick Rucker**

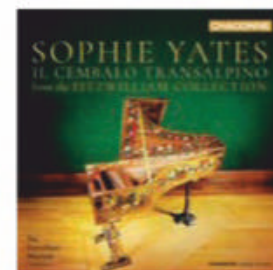
'Il cembalo transalpino'

'Music from the Fitzwilliam Collection'

Anonymous Passamezzo Pavan and Galliard **Arresti** Sonata in A **Caccini** Amarilli, mia bella **Colonna** Sonata in D minor **Corelli** Sonata Op 5 No 7 **Frescobaldi** Toccata settima **Galeazzo** Prelude **Marenzio** Così morirò. Frenò Tirsi il desio. Tirsi morir volea **Philips** Passamezzo Pavan and Galliard **Picchi** Toccata **Pollarolo** Sonata in D minor **Striggio** Che farà fede al cielo **Zipoli** Canzona

Sophie Yates *hpd*

Chandos Chaconne © CHAN0819 (65' • DDD)



Read carefully. This is not a disc of music from the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book – the

giant manuscript of keyboard pieces by Byrd, Bull, Farnaby and others, copied out in the early 17th century – but of selected works from the larger collection that contains it, assembled in the second half of the 18th century by the seventh Viscount Fitzwilliam and now held in the Cambridge museum that bears his name. Sure, many of the pieces here are from the FVB, but they sit alongside music by various later Italian composers, and even a surprisingly successful harpsichord arrangement (perhaps by Thomas Roseingrave) of a violin sonata by Corelli.

Sophie Yates says her intention is to highlight connections between English music and Italian, and this she does well by including some of Peter Philips's keyboard 'intabulations' of madrigals by Marenzio and others. Philips's technique was to take



Sophie Yates marries English and Italian music from the Fitzwilliam Collection

the rich harmonic skeleton of the originals and use his restless keyboard imagination to turn them into genuine harpsichord pieces driven by free-flowing ornamentation. They are still recognisable if you know the originals, as many will in the case of Caccini's *Amarilli, mia bella*. But Yates also links Italy and England by offering two examples of that quintessentially English pairing of pavan and galliard, given an Italian groundplan by *passamezzo* chord sequences. The anonymous one, from Tisdale's Virginal Book, is the kind of piece that could be better known if it had a composer's name attached to it – Philips's would fit well. The sonatas by Arresti and Pollarollo won't change your life but there is drama in Picchi's Toccata and Zipoli's Canzona, while Frescobaldi's Toccata shows his usual balance of capriciousness and control, the tension of it well captured by Yates's playing.

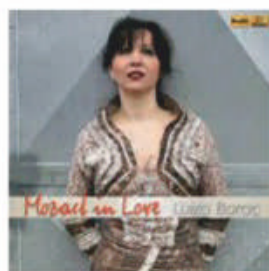
The Fitzwilliam connection is clinched by Yates's use of the Museum's early 17th-century Tuscan harpsichord by Boni, a crisp, full-throated and deep-coloured beauty. Her playing is strong-fingered, buoyant and well-paced – strange, then, that there are missing notes here and there that you would expect to have been fixed in the editing. But this is an unusual and well-conceived programme, appealingly performed. **Lindsay Kemp**

'Mozart in Love'

Chopin Variations on 'Là ci darem la mano', Op 2^a **Liszt** *Réminiscences de Don Juan*, S418 **Mozart** Don Giovanni – Serenade (arr Bizet). Rondo, K511. Variations – on 'Ah, vous dirais-je, maman', K265; on 'Ein Weib ist das herrlichste Ding', K613

Luiza Borac *pf*^a **Romanian National Radio Orchestra, Bucharest / Horia Andreescu** Profil © PH18092 (78' • DDD)

^aRecorded live by Radio Romania Bucharest, October 2010



Perhaps a better title here would be 'In love with Mozart'. The programme is

designed around various responses to Mozart's Don Juan – hero of libertinage, seduction and lust, rather than love – with which other composers were clearly in love.

Chopin and Liszt's hommages are preceded by two sets of Mozart variations and his A minor Rondo, all performed stylishly and elegantly, if at times sounding rather too straight and impersonal. Compare, for instance, Luiza Borac's *Ah, vous dirai-je, maman* with Christoph Eschenbach's (DG, 4/65^R), who ventures beyond the apparent childish

simplicity to discover a touchingly nostalgic tone.

In general a first-person narrative voice is missing throughout Borac's solid performances. Not that solidity is to be despised: Liszt's *Réminiscences de Don Juan* was reportedly one of the causes of Scriabin's celebrated right-hand injury. Borac manages some effective shaping and voicing, with a minimum of smudges and some pardonable hardness of tone. But there is little of the daredevil thrill that the finest accounts, such as Louis Lortie's, achieve here (Chandos, 2/14).

The same goes for Chopin's *Là ci darem la mano* Variations, the very piece that provoked Schumann's famous 'Hats off, gentlemen' remark. Heard here in its original piano-and-orchestra guise, though often played without the orchestra, including by Chopin himself, the variations are brilliant to the *n*th degree and clearly designed to bring the house down at regular intervals – in fact Chopin claimed that he could hardly hear the orchestra *tuttis* for the loud applause generated by his solos. Borac is sensitive and not without charm but still rather serious and over-thoughtful for such a showy piece. For the requisite sparkle, fun and panache, turn to Ax (Sony Classical, 7/99^R), on a historic instrument, or Arrau (Philips 7/73^R).

Michelle Assay

Julia Wolfe

This American has important things to say through her punchy and remarkably eclectic music, says **Andrew Farach-Colton**

I think of myself as a renegade,' Julia Wolfe told American National Public Radio after winning the Pulitzer Prize for music in 2015 for *Anthracite Fields* – then added, with typical modesty: 'Probably I'm not supposed to say that. Someone else is supposed to say that about me. But I've always been someone who challenges the system.'

Not only has Wolfe challenged the system, she's changed it. In 1987, she and fellow composers Michael Gordon and David Lang founded Bang on a Can, a new music collective that's become an indispensable part of New York City's cultural scene. Gordon and Lang rapidly went on to make careers for themselves independent of Bang on a Can. Wolfe has had a somewhat tougher time, but the Pulitzer Prize was followed almost immediately by a MacArthur Fellowship and a host of high-profile commissions, and she's now firmly established in her own right.

There's a commitment to grappling with difficult subjects, and what makes her message all the more powerful is its clear and steady focus on the human element

Wolfe grew up in a small Pennsylvania town. She dutifully studied the piano, but was initially drawn more to folk and rock than to classical music. As an undergraduate at the University of Michigan, she was a self-described 'flower child', played the mountain dulcimer and participated in a women's drumming ensemble. Her interest in composition was unexpectedly awakened in a course entitled Creative Musicianship, largely because the instructor, Jane Heirich, avoided any notion of musical hierarchies; Dave Brubeck and Terry Riley were taught alongside Bach and Brahms. 'It was all music,' Wolfe told the *New York Times* in 2011. 'And that was a wonderful way to start looking at all kinds of new ideas.' Heirich also connected Wolfe to her first composition teacher, Laura Clayton (a student of Milhaud and Mario Davidovsky). Looking back, Wolfe says that having these women as musical role models was crucial to her development. In a 2016 YouTube interview with fellow composer Wang Jie, she says that although she had some great male teachers, there's something about having women 'in those leadership positions': 'It says something to younger women who want to create.'

From Michigan, Wolfe made her way to New York, where she met Gordon (whom she married in 1984) and Lang, then went on to Yale for graduate studies in composition. Back in New York in 1986, Wolfe and her two colleagues had trouble finding a niche for themselves. 'When I first came to New York, it was not such a friendly place,' Wolfe recalls. There were the 'uptown' serialists and the 'downtown' minimalists,

WOLFE FACTS

Born Philadelphia, PA, USA, December 18, 1958

Studies University of Michigan (BA, 1980), Yale University (MM, 1986), Princeton University (PhD, 2012)

Diverse influences Joni Mitchell, Led Zeppelin, Xenakis, Ligeti, Steve Reich, Louis Andriessen, early music and so on

Composer-in-residence Dallas Symphony Orchestra (2018-20)

Passing the torch Professor of Composition, New York University (from 2009)

Wolfe on Wolfe 'Writing music for me is a constant evolution. I go through an intense search process at the beginning of each piece to figure out just what the piece is about. I work up a kind of maniacal focus' (2014)

but she, Gordon and Lang didn't feel comfortable in either camp, so they formed their own. 'We almost didn't have a choice. There was really no other way to get our music out there.'

Bang on a Can (the name was Wolfe's idea) came to life in an art gallery in Soho, New York, in the spring of 1987 with a 12-hour marathon concert of music by a diversity of composers including Cage, Babbitt and Steve Reich. Today, Bang on a Can is a major arts organisation encompassing a variety of ensembles, a commissioning fund, residencies, festivals and educational outreach.

One can hear something of Bang on a Can's stylistic eclecticism in Wolfe's works from the group's early years. The slowly shifting colours in the first minutes of the orchestral piece *The Vermeer Room* (1989), for example, seem a sideways glance at Schoenberg's 'Farben' (from the Five Orchestral Pieces, Op 16), while the sustained, open sonorities at the beginning of *Four Marys* (1991), composed for the Cassatt Quartet, view a Coplandesque big sky landscape through a distorting haze.

Wolfe spent 1992 in Amsterdam, where she met Louis Andriessen (the two were often doubles partners in ping-pong). The Dutch composer's influence is palpable in *Arsenal of Democracy* (1993) for large ensemble, with its relentless, syncopated energy, wheezing chords and jittery fanfares. *Early that Summer* (1993), for string quartet, which she began composing while in Amsterdam, picks up from more or less the same place, yet a subtle lyricism peeks out between the long rails of driving rhythm. Wolfe was reading a book on US political history while she wrote it, and in her programme note she says: 'The author would introduce small incidents with phrases like "Early that summer ...". Incidents





PHOTOGRAPHY: PETER SERLING

would snowball into major political events or crises. I realized that the music I was writing was exactly like this – that I was creating a state of anticipation and forward build.’

Soon after returning to New York, Wolfe wrote *Lick* (1994) for Bang on a Can All-Stars, an amplified sextet formed in 1992 and the performing heart of the organisation. Again, freneticism is a salient feature, but now there’s also a groove. The composer writes: ‘The body energy of pop music definitely came into my music in *Lick*. Motown, funk, rock. This is the music I grew up on – listening, dancing to it.’

From her earliest works, as in *The Vermeer Room*, Wolfe’s been concerned with tone colour, and it’s led her to write for some unusual configurations. *My Lips from Speaking* (1993) for six pianos is built entirely from the opening chords of Aretha Franklin’s hit song ‘Think’, and appears to take the song’s title very much to heart in its rigorous rumination on that brief harmonic progression. *Dark Full Ride* (2002), a percussion quartet for four drum kits, is a bit like viewing a rock drummer’s solo in the aural equivalent of a funhouse mirror. And then there’s *Lad* (2007) for nine bagpipes, whose other-worldly first part, with its slowly ascending glissandos, is close to ambient music – not so surprising, really, given that in the late 1990s Wolfe and her Bang on a Can colleagues

created and recorded a virtuoso instrumental arrangement of Brian Eno’s *Music for Airports*.

In recent years, Wolfe has moved from concision – most of her works are 10 to 20 minutes in duration – to working on a much larger scale. *Steel Hammer* (2009), written for the vocal ensemble Trio Mediaeval and the Bang on a Can All-Stars, runs for well over an hour. For its text, she examined more than 200 versions of the John Henry ballad (a tale of man vs machine that’s very much the product of the Industrial Revolution), weaving fragments together into an entirely new fabric in order to, she says, ‘tell the story of the story’. Musically, Wolfe draws from the deep well of the Appalachian folk tradition.

The theme of ‘work’ also threads through *Anthracite Fields* (2014), which earned Wolfe her Pulitzer Prize, and *Fire in my Mouth* (2019), premiered earlier this year by the New York Philharmonic. Both deal with dark moments in US labour history – the former with working conditions in the coal mines in the composer’s native Pennsylvania, the latter with the tragic 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York – and, like *Steel Hammer*, they were painstakingly researched. Wolfe’s texts are ingeniously structured and have a dramatic punch that’s intensified by the music. Given the subject matter, this does not always make for easy listening. In this commitment to grappling with difficult subjects, she rather unexpectedly picks up the tradition of post-war European composers like Zimmermann, Nono, Dallapiccola and Henze, who used music as a form of social commentary and protest. What makes her message all the more powerful is its clear and steady focus on the human element.

A few years back, clarinettist and composer Evan Ziporyn, a founding member of the Bang on a Can All-Stars, wrote that he heard a ‘highly humanistic message’ in Wolfe’s music; ‘a wonderful example of humanly organized sound, working toward a soundly organized humanity’. This message rings out even more resoundingly today. **G**

A RENEGADE COMPOSER ON RECORD

Hear how she challenges the system in every way



‘Dark Full Ride’

Robert Black *db* Lisa Moore *pf* Matthew Welch *bagpipes*

Talujon Percussion Quartet

Cantaloupe

Four quarter-hour explorations of tone colour, including the title-work for a quartet of drum kits and the mesmeric *Lad* for nine bagpipes.



Steel Hammer

Bang on a Can All-Stars; Trio Mediaeval

Cantaloupe (A/14)

Wolfe’s meticulous deconstruction of the John Henry ballad blends her trademark urban dynamism with the luminosity of Appalachian traditional music.



Anthracite Fields

The Choir of Trinity Wall Street / Julian Wachner;

Bang on a Can All-Stars

Cantaloupe (1/16)

Wolfe’s gritty, postmodern take on the oratorio looks unflinchingly at the lives of Pennsylvania coal miners. Through humanising this dark and difficult subject, Wolfe’s music ultimately uplifts.

Vocal



Alexandra Coghlan hears the latest album from Magdalena Kožená:

'Kožená has chosen the repertoire with care, with a really delectable selection, and the emotional range is exhilarating' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 83**



Edward Seckerson basks in the sunshine with Elina Garanča:

'Just when you think you might overdose on lovelorn romanticism, we get Piazzolla's edgy, fiery tango' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 85**

Amner

Complete Consort Music

Dublin Consort Singers; Fretwork / Mark Keane

Rubicon © RCD1032 (73' • DDD • T)



A near-contemporary of Gibbons, Tomkins and Weelkes, John Amner (1579-1641)

left just one publication behind at his death (though a generous selection of other works have been preserved and subsequently edited). His *Sacred Hymns of 3, 4, 5 and 6 parts for Voyces and Vyols* was printed in 1615 and its contents, recorded here in full by Fretwork and the Dublin Consort Singers, offer a good introduction to the composer, ranging from simple, declamatory early settings to elaborate five-part polyphony and accompanied verse anthems.

At first listen it's hard to find that distinctive musical identity that, within just a few bars, sets a Weelkes or Gibbons motet apart. But if Amner's stylistic voice is more anonymous, his skill is significant. The three-voice *Distressed soul* finds some unexpected harmonic colours in its intimate portrait of human grief. Sin is, by turns, repugnant, poignant and overwhelming, and the music eventually collapses into ever more drawn-out suspensions, wailing cries of 'aye me'. *Come let's rejoice*, by contrast, is an ebullient romp of an anthem in the tradition of Byrd's *Sing joyfully*, bright with antiphonal effects and chattering delight.

Most impressive are the pair of five-voice anthems *Thus sings that heavenly quire* and *The heavens stood all amazed*, which blend madrigalian word-painting with intricate counterpoint, moving between imitative counterpoint and more Italianate antiphony, as well as the verse anthems *O ye little flock*, with its neatly characterised and differentiated solo verse sections, and *Consider, all ye passers by*, which sets a solo tenor against a full five-voice texture.

Performances by the Dublin Consort Singers are neat and carefully shaped by director Mark Keane, the tone throughout clean and unfussy. Fretwork are a luxury addition for the verse anthems, and a Galliard and more extended Pavan give them a chance to get their teeth more thoroughly into music that, if not of the urgent first rank of the period, has plenty of quiet charm to recommend it. A somewhat terse booklet note by Keane himself rather short-changes the music. Anyone curious should consult the much more detailed account in Anthony J Greening's *Grove* entry. **Alexandra Coghlan**

JS Bach

'In Celebration of Bach'

Cantatas: No 11, Praise our God^a; No 67, Hold in affection Jesus Christ^b; No 147 - Chorale, 'Jesu, joy of man's desiring'^c. Magnificat, BWV243^d

^{abd}**Kathleen Ferrier** *contr* ^a**Ena Mitchell**, ^d**Friedl Riegler**, ^d**Irmgard Seefried** *sops* ^{ab}**William Herbert**, ^d**Hugo Meyer-Welfing** *tens* ^d**Otto Edelmann**, ^{ab}**William Parsons** *basses* ^{abc}**The Cantata Singers**; ^{abc}**The Jacques Orchestra / Reginald Jacques**; ^d**Vienna State Opera Chorus**; ^d**Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Volkmar Andreae**
Somm Ariadne © ARIADNE5004 (78' • AAD • T/t)
Recorded ^{abc}1949; ^dlive at the Grosser Musikvereinsaal, Vienna, June 10, 1950
From Decca ^aLX3006 (9/50), ^bcLX3007 (11/50)



In June 1950 Kathleen Ferrier made her Viennese debut in a series of concerts at

the Musikverein as part of an international festival to mark the bicentenary of Bach's birth. Already familiar to Austrian audiences (she made her Salzburg debut the year before), she took part in performances of the *St Matthew Passion* and B minor Mass, both with Karajan, and the *Magnificat*, originally scheduled to be conducted by Klemperer, though his withdrawal due to illness led to his replacement by the altogether lesser-known Volkmar Andreae. Broadcast by Austrian

Radio, the Passion and Mass have been readily available on several labels over the years. The *Magnificat*, however, remained elusive until a single copy, apparently on vinyl, was offered for sale on an internet auction site last year. Thanks to Somm, we now have the performance on CD, though the booklet notes give scant information as to the recording's provenance and we still know less about its history than we would wish.

It goes without saying that it is an important addition to Ferrier's discography, and she is indeed marvellous in it, singing 'Esurientes implevit bonis' with that unique, indescribable tone and expressive sincerity that characterises her finest work. She also, one notices, exercises a steadying effect on some of her colleagues. First soprano Friedl Riegler sounds tentative in 'Et exsultavit', while the tenor Hugo Meyer-Welfing makes heavy weather of 'Deposuit potentes': their uncertainties seemingly vanish, however, in their ensembles with Ferrier. Elsewhere you have to make allowances. This is grand-manner Bach on a scale that many would consider indefensible today, though Andreae conducts with great élan and energy. Playing and choral singing are both enthusiastic if heavyweight, but the boxy sound blurs too much detail and distorts at the climaxes. Irmgard Seefried, singing second soprano, is, as one might expect, glorious. Otto Edelmann, however, best known as Ochs in Karajan's EMI *Rosenkavalier*, is miscast here, gritty and unappealing. There's a lot of coughing and platform movement, and someone – Andreae, one assumes – can be heard violently stamping their feet at the start of 'Omnes generationes'.

Its companion pieces are the English-language recordings of Cantatas Nos 11 (the *Ascension Oratorio*) and 67 that Ferrier made with Reginald Jacques, released by Decca also in June 1950, and both handsomely remastered, with only the occasional moment of surface hiss reminding us of their age. It's easy to forget how pioneering they were in their day: they



Magdalena Kožená, with the exemplary Collegium 1704 and Václav Luks, presents an imaginative Baroque programme – see review on page 83

were among the first recordings of any of the choral cantatas to be made; and Jacques's insistence on smallish forces and absolute clarity of texture and polyphony was deemed both novel and controversial at the time. Seventy years on the sharply focused playing and choral singing still impress, though some might find Jacques's conducting a fraction solemn nowadays. Ferrier has only two brief passages of recitative in No 67, where the tenor and bass arias are dispatched with considerable eloquence by William Herbert and William Parsons respectively. She comes into her own, though, in No 11, where she's truly magnificent: her central aria, imploring the risen Christ to 'tarry yet' on earth, remains one of the most beautiful things she ever committed to disc.

Tim Ashley

Boccherini

Stabat mater, G532^a. Cello Concertos – No 6, G479; No 9, G482^b. Symphony No 6, 'La casa del diavolo', G506. String Quintet, 'La musica notturna delle strade di Madrid', Op 30 No 6 G324. Cello Sonata No 2, G2^c

^aSandrine Piau *sop* ^cFrancesco Corti *pf*
Pulcinella Orchestra / Ophélie Gaillard *bvc*
Aparté (two discs for the price of one) AP194
(118' • DDD • T/t)



Ophélie Gaillard and her Pulcinella Orchestra turn to Boccherini for

their latest release on Aparté, a finely programmed double album that presents a considered cross-section of the composer's output and juxtaposes the relatively familiar (the Ninth Cello Concerto, *La musica notturna delle strade di Madrid*) with the lesser known (the *Stabat mater*, in its first version for soprano and five solo strings, rather than the later revision for multiple voices).

By her own admission, Gaillard takes liberties in her realisation of this repertory, some of which perhaps are more successful than others. Boccherini's un-figured basses, not only in the Second Sonata but also in the symphony and concertos, are assigned not to the usual cello or double bass but to a pianoforte, graciously played by Francesco Corte, whose arpeggios and figurations propel the music forwards with relaxed energy and charm. More contentiously, however, she adds a bassoon to the double string quintet she deploys for *Musica notturna*, along with what the

booklet notes describe as 'discreet percussion'. Some of it, I'm afraid, is not as discreet as it might be, and while you probably won't be unduly bothered by the rattle of a tambourine in the famous 'Passa calle', you might find the use of bells and chimes elsewhere gets irritatingly in the way of a performance that otherwise has great elegance and élan.

The high point is arguably the *Stabat mater*, an extraordinary work, in some ways, that weaves a multiplicity of styles and genres – sparse recitative, solo motet, instrumental polyphony, operatic aria – into an extended meditation at once haunting and profound, sung here with exquisite purity of tone and line and restrained intensity of expression by Sandrine Piau. The D minor *Casa del diavolo* Symphony has plenty of drive, drama and panache, particularly in the final rondo, which effectively filches music from Gluck's *Le festin de pierre* that Gluck himself reworked as the 'Danse des furies' in the 1774 Paris *Orphée*. Gaillard, of course, comes into her own in the two concertos and sonata, playing with great tonal warmth and directness of expression, all the while meeting Boccherini's technical challenges with accomplished ease. The C minor Sonata,

GRAMOPHONE *Focus*

A BUXTEHUDE BINGE

Marc Rochester finds varied pleasures in three different approaches to Buxtehude's cycle of cantatas *Membra Jesu nostri*



Full yet transparent sound: The Ricercar Consort and Philippe Pierlot bring expressive clarity to Buxtehude

Buxtehude

Membra Jesu nostri, BuxWV75

Tanya Aspelmeier, Stéphanie Révidat, Salomé

Haller *sops* **Rolf Ehlers** *counterten* **Julian**

Prégardien *ten* **Benoît Arnould** *bass* **Colmar**

Maîtrise de Garçons; La Chapelle Rhénane /

Benoît Haller

Christophorus Ⓢ CHR77436 (61' • DDD)

From K617 K617 207 (10/08)



Little is known about the origins of Buxtehude's *Membra Jesu nostri*. It is cast as a cycle of seven cantatas reflecting on, in ascending sequence from feet to face, seven different body parts of Christ as a focus for a contemplation of Christ's suffering on the Cross. It stands as a unique and special work in the composer's output of sacred vocal music, not least because it is not part of any Lutheran liturgy; and in using a Latin text it seems that Buxtehude was not writing the work for a specific ecclesiastical performance but as something to be pored over and inspected by a circle of scholars.

That idea is reinforced by the unusual level of imagination and originality in its construction, as well as in Buxtehude's often ingenious responses to the text. While it may be that individual cantatas were originally performed in isolation, there is an unarguable logic in presenting all seven in a continuous sequence, which is how most of us today know the work. By my reckoning there are at least two

dozen recordings currently available, most of which are highly impressive. Now we have three more.

Even so, each of these new recordings offers something individual which makes them enticing on their own terms. The weightiest comes from Benoît Haller, La Chapelle Rhénane and La Maîtrise de Garçons de Colmar, where, with boys' voices on the top line and hefty instrumental support, the overall effect is more choral society than period performance. Certainly this very full sound brings out the drama of the work; and with six powerful, almost operatic soloists, the performance has a breadth and expansiveness that is well captured by the full-blooded engineering. At times, this performance does come dangerously close to being bogged down by the sheer weight of numbers, and I find the sixth cantata ('To the Heart') possibly a little too robust and operatic to be wholly convincing as an intense devotion to the dying Christ. The fifth cantata ('To the Breast') does, however, burst into life with a glorious explosion of energy and some superbly detailed singing from the three male soloists.

Supplementing the same vocal and instrumental forces he used on his 2017 Priory disc devoted to the sacred music of Purcell with the newly formed

Buxtehude

Membra Jesu nostri, BuxWV75

Eloise Irving, Charlotte Ives *sops* **Daniel Collins**

counterten **Nicholas Mulroy** *ten* **Reuben Thomas**

bass **The Chapel Choir of Trinity Hall, Cambridge;**

Orpheus Britannicus; Neue Vialles /

Andrew Arthur

Resonus Ⓢ RES10238 (70' • DDD • T/t)

Buxtehude

Membra Jesu nostri, BuxWV75.

Gott, hilf mir!, BuxWV34

Maria Keohane, Hanna Bayodi-Hirt *sops* **Carlos**

Mena *counterten* **Jeffrey Thompson** *ten* **Matthias**

Vieweg *bass* **Ricercar Consort / Philippe Pierlot**

Mirare Ⓢ MIR444 (79' • DDD • T/t)



period-instrument ensemble Newe Vialles, Andrew Arthur has also assembled a substantial body of performers. Yet he uses them most effectively, drawing from them an intimacy and directness of expression which gets right to the core of the work. Interpretatively, the most impressive thing is Arthur's pacing and sense of deep repose. Time seems to stand still with the orchestral Sonata which opens the fourth cantata ('To the Side') before gently moving on into a decidedly Monteverdian setting of a text derived from the Song of Solomon. At no time do you feel that Andrew Arthur is in any sort of a hurry to get through the work, and a sense that at every corner and turn he is content to linger contemplatively imbues this performance with a rare sense of ease.

Excellent as both these recordings are, they are somewhat eclipsed by the third, from Philippe Pierlot and the Ricercar Consort. While Haller drew on the services of a large chorus, six soloists and an instrumental ensemble of some dozen players, and Arthur used 29 voices and an instrumental ensemble of 10, Pierlot makes do with just five singers and nine instrumentalists. That, though, is no recipe for thin and desiccated sound. Instead what we have here is a wonderfully full yet transparent sound, greatly enhanced by the sheer quality of the voices, and recorded with such luxuriance that the only concessions to the thinner forces are greater flexibility and a sense of a more focused expressive intent. This is a truly lovely recording which certainly lacks neither the drama nor the intimacy of the others, but adds to it a clarity of thought and expressive detail that I find wholly absorbing.

Unique among these latest recordings of *Membra Jesu nostri*, Pierlot adds a useful filler in the shape of Buxtehude's unequivocally Lutheran chorale-based cantata *Gott, hilf mir!*. This pales only slightly in comparison with *Membra Jesu nostri*, and with Matthias Vieweg in fine voice and the violins of the Ricercar Consort vividly evoking his terror at being stuck in mud with the tide rushing in, this is no mere makeweight to fill 10 spare minutes but a highly distinguished performance that caps a highly distinguished disc. **G**

placed directly after the *Stabat mater*, sounds quite stark, and the wit of the D major Concerto contrasts nicely with the greater formality and grandeur of the Ninth in G major. It's a fine and enjoyable set, provided *Musica notturna* is not your main focus of interest.

Tim Ashley

Dubourg

'Welcome home, Mr Dubourg'

Dubourg Ciste nó stór. Dubourg's Maggot.

Eileen Aroon. Hibernia's sons, your voices raise.

Now the mingling hosts engage. Ode for Dublin

Castle. Soft breathes the melting flute. Trumpet

Tune. Violin Concerto in D. Welcome home,

Mr Dubourg **Corelli** Violin Sonata, Op 5 No 9

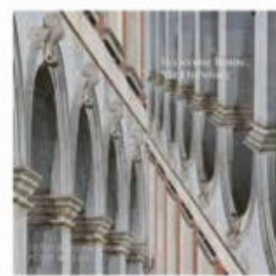
Vivaldi Concerto for Two Violins, RV519

Sophie Gent, Claire Duff *vns* **Anna Devin** *sop*

Rachel Kelly *mez* **Edward Grint** *bass*

Irish Baroque Orchestra / Peter Whelan

Linn © CKD532 (61' • DDD • T)



If the name Matthew Dubourg (1703-67) rings any bells today it's probably because

there's a rather good story about the violinist-composer performing with Handel in Dublin – an encounter wittily referenced in the title of this fascinating project by Peter Whelan and the Irish Baroque Orchestra. But in Dubourg's own age it was a different matter. Praised in poetry and song, even delighting the demanding Charles Burney, this pupil of Geminiani was, in Whelan's words, 'one of Ireland's most influential musicians'.

Up until now Dubourg's music has remained unpublished and unrecorded, so this disc is a treasure trove of world premieres, exploring the musician's double life as both composer and virtuoso performer. The latter means setting Dubourg's own music alongside works by Corelli and Vivaldi – a fascinating if brave comparison.

Dubourg's Violin Concerto in D is an attractive affair. The opening *Adagio* is all stately, Handelian swagger – a curtain-raiser for a graceful, lilting dance of an *Allegro*, a courtly slow movement and a larky closer that's more romping Irish jig than polished giga. And there's more welcome Irishness in the exuberant and intricately ornamented set of variations *Dubourg's Maggot*, as well as two further folk songs.

The Australian violinist Sophie Gent takes the Dubourg role throughout the programme, and it's hard not to wonder how this sweet-toned, contained

performer compares to the original. Corelli's Sonata in A, Op 5 No 9, shows off the fluttering beauty of both Dubourg's own ornamentation and Gent's agility, but both this and Vivaldi's A major Concerto for two violins (where Gent is joined by Claire Duff) feel markedly more subdued than rival recordings.

The most extended Dubourg work here is the 1739 *Ode for Dublin Castle* – an example of the composer's prolific official voice as Chief Composer at the castle. Echoes of Handel and Arne are hard to escape but the 20-minute choral work has plenty of charm and an easy way with melody. Anna Devin and Rachel Kelly are luxurious soloists, at their best in lingering vocal embrace in the duet 'Pleased with our state'. Lone movements from other odes include the artful thundering of *Now the mingling hosts engage* (with bass Edward Grint and bassoonist Carles Cristobal twinkle-eyed soloists) and the cool bucolic beauty of Anna Devin's *Soft breathes the melting flute*.

As musical homecomings go, this is definitely more Prodigal Son than unwelcome guest. **Alexandra Coghlan**

Dvořák

St Ludmila, Op 71 B144

Adriana Kohútová *sop* **Karla Bytnarová** *contr*

Tomáš Černý, Ondrej Šaling *tens* **Peter Milkuláš**

bass **Slovak Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra /**

Leoš Svárovský

Naxos © ② 8 574023/4 (101' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at the Concert Hall of the Slovak Philharmonic, Bratislava, April 29 & 30, 2015



Told in a narrative reversal of *King Roger* and at considerably greater length than

Szymanowski's opera, Dvořák's commission for the 1886 Leeds Festival belongs to the spirit of its times – and not to ours – more than any of his other oratorios such as the Gothic romance of *The Spectre's Bride*. It preaches a conversion parable of Ludmila from pagan princess into Christian queen who became patron saint of Bohemia having suffered a martyr's death, strangled with her veil by henchmen of her daughter-in-law, so the legend goes.

Dvořák had no place for the malevolent Drahomira, however, nor her son, the good king Wenceslas. Seeking to top the success of the *Stabat mater* with a more local expression of piety, at a time when the Austrian police had banned the singing of Czech songs following political

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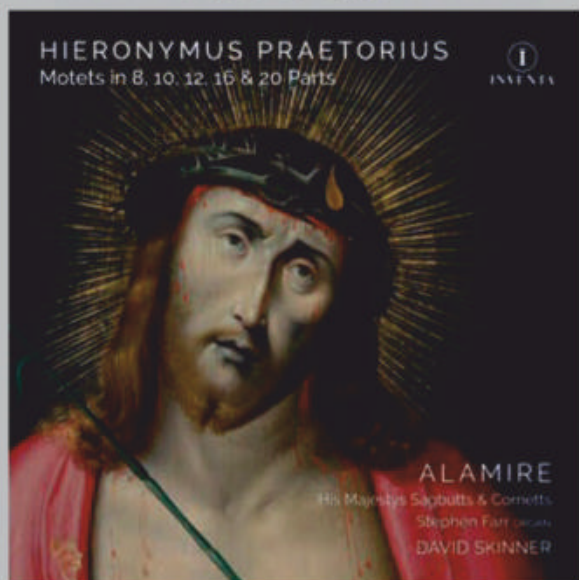
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Orpheus Britannicus; Neue Viales; Andrew Arthur (director)

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disturbances in 1884, he wrote to his publisher Simrock that ‘an artist also has a country for which he must have firm faith and a fervent heart’.

Even the well-disposed reviewer of *The Musical Times* observed at the premiere that the composer/conductor had treated his theme ‘at very considerable length’. Dvořák shortened and revised *St Ludmila* for a staged version, and almost every modern performance has taken his lead, especially in the baptismal pageantry of the third and final part. None so drastically as Leoš Svárovský, however, whose concert performance in 2015 lops off an hour of music. Almost all the recitative is cut, compromising what little dramatic momentum Dvořák managed to sustain in between Handelian slabs of choral work. Svárovský has been even more ruthless than the late Jiří Bělohlávek, who directed the piece live several times, including a Czech Philharmonic performance released by Arco Diva (6/06).

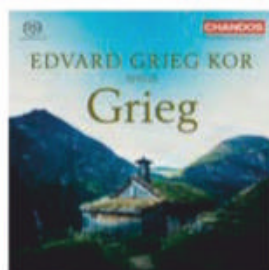
Further comparisons are not flattering to the newcomer. Tubby recorded sound captures a little stage and audience noise but does no favours to the inner parts of the hard-working and sometimes overstretched chorus. Peter Mikuláš lacks neither presence nor experience in declaiming what little is left of the Wolfram-like part for Ivan, the hermit who prompts Ludmila’s conversion, but he was in much better voice for Bělohlávek in 2004. Inclined to shrillness in the heat of the moment, Adriana Kohútková brings affecting simplicity to the title-role and the other soloists form a strong team.

While this is a record magazine, I would be failing in my duty if I did not draw your attention to a film of the work’s most recent native performance. Available on YouTube, it was recorded in Prague’s Rudolfinum in September 2018 (on the eve of St Ludmila’s name day), graced with a luminous and captivating account of the title-role by Kateřina Kněžíková, and directed with a persuasive sweep and conviction by Jakub Hruša, who makes no apologies for presenting the piece complete, flaws and all.

Peter Quantrill

Grieg

Bull The Herdgirl’s Sunday **Grieg** Ave maris stella. Four Psalms, Op 74. Holberg Suite, Op 40 **Grøndahl** The evening is quiet **D Lang** Last Spring **Traditional** I went to bed one night **Audun Iversen** bar **Edvard Grieg Choir / Håkon Matti Skrede, Paul Robinson** Chandos   CHSA5232 (64’ • DDD/DSD • T/t)



David Lang’s *Last Spring* is a beautiful, distilled and resonant work after

Grieg and is nobly sung by the Bergen-based Edvard Grieg Choir here, as is the Norwegian composer’s own choral arrangement of his *Ave maris stella*. Beyond those two tracks, we’re into problematic territory. Grieg’s *Fire Salmer* (‘Four Psalms’) suffer from having a soloist of different vocal proportions (Audun Iversen) grafted on to a tight and luminous ensemble (though doubled in size here), when the music suggests the baritone emerge as a first among equals. Sometimes the performances survive the strain, as in ‘Jesus Kristus er opfaren’ (‘Jesus Christ has ascended’). ‘Guds Søn har gjort mig fri’ (‘The Son of God hath set me free’) is taken quickly and delivered theatrically, losing much sense of the Lutheran soul that is both its context and its lifeblood.

A passable start, but this album alienates itself quickly thereafter. Paul Robinson’s arrangements of Ole Bull’s *Sæterjentens Søndag* (‘The Herdgirl’s Sunday’), Agathe Grøndahl’s *Aftenen er stille* (‘The evening is quiet’) and the traditional *Jeg lagde mig så sildig* (‘I went to bed one night’) are frighteningly naff, slathered with schmaltzy added notes and misty preambles, every harmonic passage smoothed into something faux-jazz and desperate to endear. To my ears, the results have nothing to do with this music’s strength, honesty, pain or power and the performances, aping the style of a club singer, reveal more about the place this whole enterprise wants to move it towards.

Finally, a Swingle-style vocal arrangement of Grieg’s *Holberg Suite*, all doo-wopped and jazz-handed. Jonathan Rathbone’s arrangements are skilful – they have little of the try-hard croon of Robinson’s – but not even he can address the challenge of the widening tessitura of the work, which proves a consistent problem in performance where blend becomes shaky and the tone develops a serrated edge. The slower movements work best; the faster ones sound like music to accompany an advert for probiotic yoghurt. Incongruous? You bet. Grieg can be and has been retouched and reimagined by choral groups, including the Norwegian Soloists’ Choir, without these debasing effects.

Andrew Mellor

Handel

Joseph and his Brethren, HWV59

Sherezade Panthaki, Gabrielle Haigh sops

Diana Moore, Abigail Levis mezs **Nicholas Phan** ten

Philip Cutlip bar **Philharmonia Chorale and**

Baroque Orchestra / Nicholas McGegan

Philharmonia Baroque     PBP11 (177’ • DDD • T/t)



‘A inimitable composition’, enthused the Earl of Egmont after the 1744 Covent

Garden premiere of *Joseph*. The oratorio’s success, in the same season that *Semele* flopped, encouraged Handel to revive it in several later seasons. Posterity, though, has judged differently. Today *Joseph* is probably the least performed of all the oratorios, hobbled by the Dorset vicar James Miller’s (to us) opaque, bathetic libretto.

‘A linguistic monstrosity’ was the verdict of the Handel scholar Winton Dean, and from a 21st-century perspective it’s hard to disagree. Language apart, Miller had zero feeling for dramatic structure and pacing. Yet Handel’s audience would have been largely familiar with the back story of the patriarch Joseph, sold into slavery in Egypt by his half-brothers – a popular subject for sermons and moralising tracts in 18th-century England. They would also have picked up many contemporary political resonances. What now seems impenetrable, sententious and/or cloyingly sentimental chimed perfectly with the taste of the day.

Still, the crucial thing for modern listeners is how far the music transcends Miller’s insipid, sometimes laughable libretto. While only the most uncritical Handel devotee would claim *Joseph* as an out-and-out masterpiece, it contains many memorable things, beginning with one of Handel’s finest overtures. Joseph himself, lurching between disquiet, petulance and self-pity, has a powerful prison scene (though Miller leaves us guessing as to why he is there) and an idyllic, nostalgic pastoral, ‘The peasant tastes the sweets of life’ – a vein that always brought out the best in Handel. The music for young Benjamin, originally composed for a boy treble, mingles innocence and delicate pathos; and the character of the guilt-ridden but fundamentally decent brother Simeon consistently ignited Handel’s imagination. The arias for Pharaoh’s butler Phanor and Joseph’s wife Asenath can be generic. That said, Phanor’s ‘Our fruits, whilst yet in blossom, die’ and the central section of Asenath’s ‘The silver stream’ have a serene breadth that is uniquely Handelian. Inspired, too, are the sombre

choruses for the penitential Brethren, above all the prayer ‘O God, who in thy heaven’ly hand’, with its intricately worked chromatic fugue: vintage Handel, this.

Joseph was well served by the one previous recording, from Robert King and his Consort. If in the end I slightly prefer it to this new version from the seasoned Handelian Nicholas McGegan and his polished Californian forces, it is a close-run thing. While McGegan usually chooses apt tempos, rhythms occasionally seem under-vitalised – say in Joseph’s air ‘Come, divine inspirer’, or the chorus of Egyptians ‘O God of Joseph’, which trips along amiably but lacks the urgency and bite of King and his all-male choir. Against that, ‘O God, who in thy heaven’ly hand’, taken broadly by McGegan, has impressive gravitas and cumulative power.

Vocally McGegan’s soloists are at least a match for King’s. The standout for me is Nicholas Phan’s intense, impassioned portrayal of Simeon. His tormented ‘Impostor! Ah my foul offence’ is a highlight of the whole performance. Diana Moore makes a mellifluous, dignified Joseph, firmer in tone, if less dramatically involved, than James Bowman in the rival recording. If the role occasionally sounds a little too low for her, she brings a gentle warmth to ‘The peasant tastes the sweets of life’, sensitively accompanied by McGegan. The final denouement, as Joseph reveals his identity to the brothers, is as moving as it should be.

While Sherezade Panthaki, as Asenath, and Abigail Levis, as Phanor, can be word-shy, both sing with attractive, full tone and a sure sense of Handelian style. Asenath’s ‘Ah Jealousy, thou pelican’ (ludicrous words to us, yet instantly comprehensible to Handel’s public) needs more vehemence, and duly receives it from Yvonne Kenny on King’s recording. But Panthaki rises superbly to the virtuoso challenge of her showcase aria ‘Prophetic raptures’, complete with extravagant interpolated cadenza.

Philip Cutlip, a solidly resonant Pharaoh, makes his mark in his rollicking aria with trumpet ‘Since the race of time began’; and Gabrielle Haigh’s fragile, boyish soprano is ideally cast in the role of Benjamin. The recorded sound is clear and well-balanced, and the documentation first-rate, with an eloquent assessment of the oratorio in its historical context from Jonathan Rhodes Lee. Whichever recording you choose – and neither should disappoint – you may well agree with him that the much-maligned Joseph is ripe for reassessment.

Richard Wigmore

Comparative version:

New Coll Ch, King’s Consort, King

(12/96) (HYPE) CDA67171/3

Jost · Schumann

Jost *Dichterliebe*, after Robert Schumann’s ‘Dichterliebe’, Op 48^a **Schumann** *Dichterliebe*, Op 48^b. Liederkreis, Op 39^b

^b**Stella Doufexis** *mez*^a **Peter Lodahl** *ten*^b **Daniel Heide** *pf*^a **Horenstein Ensemble / Christian Jost**
DG (M) ② 483 7046GH2 (115’ • DDD • T/t)



This album represents a deeply personal project – indeed, it could hardly be any more personal. The second disc features recordings of two of Schumann’s great song-cycles sung by the mezzo-soprano Stella Doufexis; the first has Christian Jost’s reworking and rearrangement of *Dichterliebe*, conceived for Doufexis, his wife, before she died of cancer in 2015, aged just 47.

And Jost’s *Dichterliebe* is perhaps best understood in relation to Doufexis’s unusually intimate, loving account of Schumann’s original – its fleet, agile and communicative character coming across in a close recording that also gives Daniel Heide’s piano a somewhat two-dimensional character. The voice is light (don’t expect forced gravitas in ‘Im Rhein, im heiligen Ströme’), but it’s always intelligently used. She offers an initially reflective ‘Ich grolle nicht’ (which seems to inform Jost’s own take on the song), creates a beautiful sense of numbness in ‘Hör ich das Liedchen klingen’ – and I like the way she skips through ‘Aus alten Märchen winkt es’. We get similar virtues in the Op 39 *Liederkreis*, with a slyly seductive ‘Waldeggespräch’ and an especially dreamy ‘Mondnacht’.

But it’s Jost’s new *Dichterliebe*, clocking in at a little over an hour, that’s nevertheless going to prove the most intriguing prospect for many. It starts interestingly, with the Horenstein Ensemble (string quartet, flute and clarinet complemented by harp, marimba, vibraphone, piano and celesta) creating a soundscape of sighs and rustles and shivers, out of which the opening motif of Schumann’s first song begins to emerge. But when Peter Lodahl enters with Schumann’s vocal line, there’s little sense of it fitting together with Jost’s refashioned accompaniments, which – unlike Hans Zender’s for his recomposed *Winterreise* – too often sacrifice rhythmic character and definition to atmospheric doodlings (meandering clarinet features regularly) and wispy *sul ponticello* whisperings.

Jost brings added intensity on occasion. There’s a knotty sense of defiance that builds throughout much of his ‘Im

Rhein, im heiligen Strome’, while the discombobulated character of ‘Hör ich das Liedchen klingen’ develops with almost nightmarish intensity and is followed by an effective and moving instrumental section based on material from the final song’s postlude. But other songs are a great deal less successful, and the vocal line’s excursions off piste are rarely rewarding, either for the listener or for an increasingly taxed Lodahl. **Hugo Shirley**

Schumann

Liederkreis, Op 24. Zwölf Gedichte

von Justinus Kerner, Op 35

Matthias Goerne *bar* **Leif Ove Andsnes** *pf*

Harmonia Mundi ⑤ HMM90 2353 (54’ • DDD • T/t)



‘Short, maliciously sentimental, and written in the folk style’ was Schumann’s

apt verdict on the pithy verses of Heine’s *Buch der Lieder*, chosen for his Op 24 *Liederkreis*. True to form, Schumann often ignores or softens the malice. In essence these songs, ‘composed with much passion and love’ for Clara, are vignettes of frustrated or lost love. Where Heine can rail or sneer, Schumann, typically, dreams; and no Lieder-singer does reverie, rapt or troubled, better than Matthias Goerne.

Two decades ago the young baritone recorded a fine *Liederkreis* with Ashkenazy (Decca, 5/98). Now in his early 50s, Goerne still sings with a scrupulous care for legato and broad, sculpted phrasing. Not a note is starved or stinted, while his clear, expressive diction remains a model. With widening operatic experience (he is in demand as Wozzeck, Amfortas and Wotan), his deep, warm, soft-grained baritone has darkened further and acquired a seam of iron at *forte* and above. In partnership with the ever-sentient Leif Ove Andsnes, lighter of touch than Ashkenazy on the earlier recording, Goerne embraces and intensifies each shade of Schumann’s rueful, confiding melancholy. But the contrasts are that much more dramatic than in his earlier recording, whether in the bitterly incisive ‘Es treibt mich hin’ – Heine’s dawdling hours given a serious run for their money – or the oscillations between lyrical yearning and feverish, yet unforced, declamation in an unusually urgent ‘Schöne Wiege meiner Leiden’. Like many baritones, Goerne transposes the songs down, but inconsistently – sometimes by a semitone, sometimes a tone, sometimes a third. In the process

he skews Schumann's carefully planned key sequence, which will worry some listeners more than others.

Goerne and Andsnes are just as compelling in Schumann's predominantly dark-toned Kerner songs, Op 35, with their recurrent images of wandering, loneliness and lost love. True, he tends to sound too sternly imposing in the cycle's few extrovert songs. The uninhibited *al fresco* joy of 'Wanderlied' and the bounding 'Wanderung' does not come as easily to him as it does to, say, Christian Gerhaher, in his superb recent recording with Gerold Huber (Sony, 2/19). But he is in his element in the introspective songs, whether in a mesmerically sustained and characterised 'Stirb, Lieb' und Freud' (where Andsnes eloquently sifts Schumann's neo-Bachian counterpoint), a secretive 'Stille Liebe', truly *innig*, as the composer asks, or a nobly sung 'Auf das Trinkglas eines verstorbenen Freundes', devoid of sentimentality. A word, too, for Andsnes's sensitive timing and shading of Schumann's dreamy and/or quizzical postludes.

In his 1998 recording of Op 35 with Eric Schneider (Decca), Goerne lingered dangerously in the Schumannised *bel canto* of 'Stille Tränen', the cycle's obvious 'hit' number. Taking a more flowing tempo and thinking through the rests, he now catches the ambivalent nocturnal mood to perfection, abetted by Andsnes's acute weighting and shaping of the pervasive repeated chords. Other baritones, including Gerhaher and Wolfgang Holzmair (Philips, 2/14), have brought more light and shade to this great cycle. But if you respond to Goerne's peculiarly intense, concentrated art, as I do in most moods, the rewards here are deep and enduring. **Richard Wigmore**

Schumann • C Schumann

C Schumann Romance, Op 11 No 2. Wenn ich ein Vöglein war^a **R Schumann** Dichterliebe, Op 48. Aus den hebräischen Gesängen (Mein Herz ist schwer), Op 25 No 15. In der Nacht, Op 74 No 4^a. Kurzes Erwachen, WoO21 No 4. Die Löwenbraut, Op 31 No 1^a. Mein Wagen rollet langsam, Op 142 No 4. Drei Romanzen, Op 28 - No 1; No 2. Sängers Trost, Op 127 No 1. Wenn ich ein Vöglein war, Op 43 No 5^a

Julian Prégardien *ten* with ^aSandrine Piau *sop*

Éric Le Sage *pf*

Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA457 (66' • DDD • T/t)



Like any conscientious artist, Julian Prégardien has taken a highly

personal journey into *Dichterliebe*, and shares it with the listener by including a mixture of Robert and Clara Schumann's music that's often more of biographical rather than musical interest. The disc starts strongly with the soaring lyricism of 'In der Nacht' from the *Spanisches Liederspiel* that begins with a solo voice, sung here by Sandrine Piau (who sings on four tracks), then joined by Prégardien halfway through to great effect. The second of Clara Schumann's *Three Romances*, Op 11, is a paragon of romanticism with the primary melody in the bass line, then evolving into something of a soliloquy without words whose eventfulness feels like a miniature epic – and rather more absorbing than Robert's Op 28 *Romances*, excerpted later on in the disc. But no matter how much Prégardien resorts to un-Lieder-like rage in 'Die Löwenbraut', it's still a thematically uninteresting seven-minute ballad that only needs to be heard once.

The folk song 'Wenn ich ein Vöglein wär' is included in versions by both composers: Clara's is simple, Robert's spun into something more emotionally complex that eventually landed in his opera *Genoveva*. If the Op 142 'Mein Wagen rollet langsam' seems a cut above many of these odds and ends, it's an outtake from *Dichterliebe* in which hallucinatory imagery and eerily passive piano motifs are almost top-drawer Schumann.

The disc's main event, of course, is *Dichterliebe*, and it's a highly committed performance that's fully realised on its own terms – though not the complete experience of Fritz Wunderlich's wounded poet (DG, 6/66) or Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau's tragic hero (Sony Classical). Prégardien brings to the music a superb command of German, a lyrical line undistorted by vibrato (has there been anything quite like it in Schumann since Felicity Lott?) and a readiness to embrace declaratory moments beyond the typical poise of Lieder recitals. His finest moments are the contrasting 'Ich will meine Seele tauchen' with a voice full of warmth and sweetness, and the chilling rage that follows in 'Im Rhein, im heiligen Strome'. Some expressive extremes have a loose-cannon quality – Schumannesque in a way but potentially annoying on repeated hearings.

Here and there, Prégardien reinstates word-settings from previous *Dichterliebe* drafts, none revelatory but accommodating his temperamental volatility. He adds unobtrusive but expressive ornaments here and there, plus a ghostly effect in No 4, 'Wenn ich in deine Augen seh': in the line 'ich liebe dich', he is shadowed by a female voice (presumably Piau's), since the line

does quote the protagonist's female loved one. Harmless additions, these. Considering that Prégardien and Le Sage have been interpolating bits of *Kreisleriana* into this brilliantly sequenced song-cycle (Clara was known to do that, which doesn't make it right), one is grateful that their interventionist sensibility stopped where it did. The 1856 Julius Blüthner piano used by Le Sage has greater colouristic possibilities than the 1837 Érard used by Andreas Staier in his disc of Schumann violin sonatas (Harmonia Mundi, 10/10). Poetic effects in the lyrical right hand are particularly luminous but the rhythmic left-hand-writing feels ham-fisted. Compared to Le Sage's past Schumann recordings on more modern instruments, however, he seems a bit inhibited here.

David Patrick Stearns

Striggio • Tallis • Hildegard

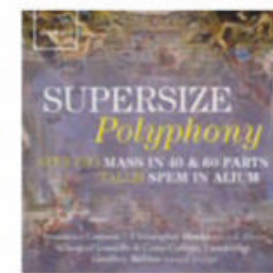
'Supersize Polyphony'

Hildegard of Bingen Ave generosa. O virtus sapientiae. O vos felices radices. Spiritus Sanctus vivicans **Striggio** Ecce beatam lucem. Missa sopra Si beato giorno **Tallis** O nata lux. Spem in alium

Choir of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge;

Armonico Consort / Geoffrey Webber

Signum Ⓢ SIGCD560 (62' • DDD • T/t)



The link between Striggio's 40-part motet and Tallis's *Spem in alium* had

long been known before Davitt Moroney identified the 40-part Mass as its companion piece early in this century. Since then both have been recorded together a couple of times before this (by Robert Hollingworth and Hervé Niquet) in nicely contrasted accounts that garnered considerable praise. In my review of Niquet's, I commented on its shrewd programming, which put Striggio in the company of other large-scale behemoths of the time (but not, for once, with *Spem*).

This new recording is different again in that it is all-vocal, with the exception of a lone bass sackbut reinforcing the bass in the Striggio pieces; whether this tells us anything new about them is a moot point, though it deserves mention as a possible 'USP' to set against rival accounts of uncommon distinction. The two assembled choirs turn in one of the fastest *Spems* I can recall, and none the worse for it, though the contrapuntal detail as the choirs come to a standstill on the final chord gets lost in the wall of sound. That aside, these are workmanlike performances; but in defence

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of my lengthy preamble I must register complete bafflement at the rest of the programme. In concert, selections from Hildegard of Bingen may work perfectly well as ‘palate-cleansers’ between movements of Striggio but such a use of music as memorable as hers suggests miscalculation. It’s not that the juxtaposition necessarily grates; I just don’t understand how either is meant to comment on the other. The booklet notes make no mention of Hildegard, and (in other ways too) they suggest things not properly thought through. **Fabrice Fitch**

Striggio Mass – selected comparisons:

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Concert Spirituel, Niquet (6/12) (GLOS) GCD5A921623

Zelenka

Missa Omnium sanctorum

Carlotta Colombo *sop* **Filippo Mineccia** *countertenor*

Cyril Auvity *ten* **Lukas Zeman** *bass*

laBarocca / Ruben Jais

Glossa © GCD924103 (50' • DDD • T/t)



Zelenka’s *Missa Omnium sanctorum* dates from 1741.

His last choral work, it was the third in a projected, albeit unfinished cycle of six final Masses, the *Sex Missae ultimae*, intended, it would seem, both as an expression of personal devotion and as a testamentary summary of his liturgical style. It is indeed a remarkable score, in some respects, though it also takes its time to find its feet. The *Kyrie* and *Gloria*, with their formal divisions into choral passages and virtuosic arias, lack the inspirational freshness of the remaining movements, and Zelenka only comes into his own in the through-composed *Credo*, effectively in rondo form, which brings with it both a sudden, heightened sense of drama and a series of fleeting yet intricate duets for the soloists. Zelenka’s much-discussed chromaticism comes to the fore at the awed start of the *Sanctus*, while the *Agnus Dei*, dominated by the Mass’s principal bass solo, is a triple-time pastoral chaconne that seems to unwind slowly into eternity.

The complexity of Zelenka’s counterpoint and the angular contours of some of the choral lines make it difficult to perform successfully, though its challenges are admirably met here by the singers and players of laBarocca under Ruben Jais. The choral singing is superbly accomplished in its balance, dexterity and poise: the big fugues, clean and clear, have plenty of élan;

there’s real nobility and grandeur at the climax of the *Credo*; and the hushed *Benedictus*, in which the polyphony subsides into a hovering unison surrounded by a halo of string figurations, is exquisite in its luminosity. Jais finely judges the work’s oscillations between ceremony, drama and reflection, while the playing blends energy with great refinement.

The soloists, however, are perhaps less than ideally matched. The tenor Cyril Auvity does wonders with the exacting ‘Christe eleison’ and shines with his flourishes in the *Gloria* and *Credo*, while the bass, Lukas Zeman, is wonderfully fervent in the *Agnus Dei*. But the soprano Carlotta Colombo sounds curiously disengaged throughout and there are a couple of slips in intonation in her ‘Qui tollis’, while the ‘Quoniam’ lies high for the countertenor Filippo Mineccia, placing his upper registers under strain, though there’s no denying the beauty of his tone lower down. **Tim Ashley**

‘Il giardino dei sospiri’

Gasparini *Atalia* – Ombre, cure sospetti **Handel**

Agrippina – Sinfonia. Qual ti riveggio, oh Dio, HWV150 **Leo** *Angelica e Medoro* – Or ch’è dal sol difesa **B Marcello** *Arianna abbandonata*

Vinci *Maria dolorata* – Sinfonia

Magdalena Kožená *mez*

Collegium 1704 / Václav Luks

Pentatone © PTC5186 725

(82' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



Magdalena Kožená may be moving forwards in her latest album – her second

with Pentatone – but she’s also looking back. ‘Il giardino dei sospiri’ not only returns Kožená to the Baroque repertoire that first launched her career but also revives a project from the past.

In 2015 the mezzo-soprano joined forces with director Karl-Ernst Herrmann to devise a staged recital – a journey not just through nature (the ‘garden’ of the title) but through the knottiest of emotional thickets, explored in solo scenes and cantatas by Handel, Leo, Vinci and Marcello. The staging may never have been completed but the project finds fresh life here in recital.

Handel aside, the repertoire is little-known. Kožená has chosen with care, presenting a really delectable selection of rarities that all make their case. The emotional range is exhilarating, taking us from the stately tragedy of Handel’s *Ero* – who, discovering her beloved Leandro

dead, flings herself into the sea – to the pretty pastoral courtship of Leo’s *Medoro* and *Angelica* and the extreme unravelling of female despair in a lone aria from Gasparini’s *Atalia*.

Kožená is at her best in repose. There’s a fluidity and control to the exquisitely expansive central aria from Marcello’s *Arianna abbandonata* and a playful ease to the Leo that recall the mezzo’s earliest recordings. But Kožená’s soprano-coloured instrument offers less at moments of intensity, where it lacks breadth and depth of colour (especially at the bottom of the voice) and where vibrato tends to become agitated and uneven. It’s hard not to think of all the other baroque mezzos out there who might bring greater colour and scope to these works.

Václav Luks and his Prague-based Collegium 1704 are exemplary collaborators, relishing the unexpectedly flighty, flirtatious string-writing of Vinci’s *Sinfonia* from *Maria dolorata* and the vivacious opening to the Marcello, always alive as accompanists to the shifting currents of these musical streams of consciousness. **Alexandra Coghlan**

‘Leonardo da Vinci’

‘La musique secrète’

Anonymous *Basse danse ‘Venus’*. Fortuna

desperata. *Lucrecia pulchra* (Mona Lisa pulchra). Per sonetti. Poi che t’hebbi nel core **Cara** *Ave Maria* – a 4; a 5. Gli pur gionto el giorno. Tante volte si si si. Vergine immacolata **Caron**

Tanto l’afano (Le despourvu infortuné)

Domenico da Piacenza *Bel fiore* **Hayne**

van Ghizeghem *De tous biens playne* **Isaac** *Fortuna desperata/Sancte Petre, ora pro nobis*

Johannes de la Fage *Elizabeth Zachariæ*

Josquin *Planxit autem David* **Lhéritier** *Ave*

Maria matris Dei **Obrecht** *Missa Fortuna*

desperata – *Agnus Dei* **Patavino** *Donne, venete*

al ballo **Pesenti** *L’acqua vale al mio gran foco*

Petrus *Ave Maria* **Pinarol** *Poi che t’hebbi nel core* **Spinacino** *Recercare* **Trombocino** *Non*

val’ acqua

Doulce Mémoire / Denis Raisin Dadre

Alpha © ALPHA456 (78' • DDD • T/t)



This new album and book from Renaissance specialists Doulce Mémoire marks

500 years since the death of Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519). More than a thoughtful programme of music from half a millennium ago, this personal journey through the Louvre’s Leonardo collection is the brainchild of director Denis Raisin Dadre, who has matched

paintings to exact musical contemporaries. Sparked by careful research and fruitful obsessions, the resulting performances – recorded in front of large reproductions of each artwork – are deliciously atmospheric.

The matchmaking process itself is fascinating. For example, Leonardo was praised for his abilities on the *lira da braccio*, larger and flatter-bridged than the fiddle and boasting two drone strings. *Dadre* describes it as making a halo of sound which he likens to Leonardo's *sfumato* technique, the layers of glaze used to create his particular misty effects. When used to accompany the upper voice of *Frater Petrus's Ave Maria* the *lira* creates a sublime, diffuse mesh of sound in which the clear but gentle voice of soprano Clara Coutouly is perfectly embedded. This is twinned with Leonardo's *The Annunciation* (1473-75) and, as with all the pictures considered, there is a handsome reproduction in the glossy accompanying book with a fascinating insight to *Dadre's* musical matchmaking. Unsurprisingly for a programme focused on music-making in late 15th-century Italy, this is a selection dominated by *oltremontani*, and this Franco-Flemish influence is crowned by Leonardo's portrait of a musician now thought to be Josquin (1450-1521). This begets one of my favourite tracks on the disc: Josquin's *Planxit autem David* has a Hilliard Ensemble-esque hue thanks to the richness of the countertenor Marnix de Cat.

As the programme unfolds from deft *basse dances* to Marchetto Cara's sprightly *Tante volte si si si* we hear an impressive and persuasive attempt to uncover Leonardo's subliminal music. The *Mona Lisa* is a high point: *Per sonetti* (1505) from a collection published by Petrucci generates another charming performance from Clara Coutouly to the luminous sound of Baptiste Romain's *lira da braccio*.

Edward Breen

'Locus iste'

Britten Hymn to the Virgin. Jubilate in C
Bruckner Locus iste **Dove** Seek him that maketh the seven stars **Finzi** God is gone up
Harris Faire is the heaven **Parry** Blest pair of sirens **Poulenc** Salve regina **Rachmaninov** Cherubic Hymn **Robinson** Jesu, grant me this, I pray **Rorem** Sing my soul, his wondrous love
Stanford Justorum animae **Swayne** Adam lay ibounden^a **Tavener** The Lamb
Woolf O vos omnes

^aLaura van der Heijden *vc* The Choir of St John's College, Cambridge / Andrew Nethsingha with Glen Dempsey *org*
Signum © SIGCD567 (74' • DDD • T/t)



As the title suggests, the latest recording from St John's College, Cambridge, is all about the spirit of place. This 100th recording from the choir marks the 150th anniversary of the consecration of the college's glorious Gilbert Scott chapel in 1869 – the same year, incidentally, that gave us Bruckner's title-track. The motet sets the theme for a sequence of works each chosen to represent a decade in the choir's history, with many also sharing more tangible, personal links to the college.

And so we get music by Britten, Rachmaninov and Parry but also commissions from Giles Swayne and recent St John's graduate Alex Woolf (whose brooding, ambivalent *O vos omnes* holds its own against earlier settings), as well as former director of music Christopher Robinson's *Jesu, grant me this, I pray* and Cambridge graduate Jonathan Dove's *Seek him that maketh the seven stars*. Even the cello soloist for Swayne's *Adam lay ibounden*, whose opening phrase coils tautly around the choir like the sins that bind its hero, is performed by current St John's student and former BBC Young Musician Laura van der Heijden.

It's a recital that celebrates both choir and building. The acoustic play of William Harris's gauzy *Faire is the heaven*, waves of sound passing between its two choirs, makes a ravishing opener – an exercise in restraint and understatement mirrored throughout the programme. Phrasing, not dynamics, does all the work in Tavener's *The Lamb* and Poulenc's *Salve regina*, and director Andrew Nethsinga's careful shaping gives stature to the slighter works by Rorem and Robinson.

But restraint is only part of the picture. It's when the pedal goes down (literally and metaphorically) that this disc really soars, startling the ear into ecstasy with the sudden release of Rachmaninov's *Cherubic Hymn*, the 'bright Seraphim' of Parry's *Blest pair of sirens* and the 'triumphant shout' of Finzi's *God is gone up*, trumpet calls courtesy of Glen Dempsey and the chapel's mighty Mander organ. Hopefully it's a fanfare that will continue to sound for another 150 years. **Alexandra Coghlan**

'Music for Saint Katherine of Alexandria'

Anonymous Gloria 'Virgo flagellatur'

Byttering En Katerine solennia **Dunstable**

Gaude virgo Katherina. Salve scema sanctitatis **Driffelde** Agnus Dei 'Eructavit cor meum'. Sanctus & Benedictus 'Regnum mundi' **Frye** Missa Nobilis et pulchra

The Binchois Consort / Andrew Kirkman

Hyperion © CDA68274 (66' • DDD • T/t)



One of the outstanding composers of the mid-15th century,

Walter Frye holds a special place in The Binchois Consort's repertory. Here they complete a longstanding project to commit all his extant Masses to disc (including an anonymous work convincingly attributed to him). This time it's the three-voice *Nobilis et pulchra*, a work whose individuality takes longer to disclose itself, perhaps, than the four-voice cycle *Flos regalis*, issued last year (9/18). On the other hand I was struck by how songlike the upper voice is (especially in the full texture) and how often it calls to mind the songs of Frye in particular. That such a specific insight is possible bespeaks the security and stylistic acumen that the Binchois bring to this repertory, their near-exclusive focus in the last few years, which has never been better served.

The remaining music is slightly earlier. The pair of Mass movements by Driffelde demonstrate how fine so much of the music by lesser-known figures can be. The lovely *En Katerine solennia* is taken at a faster pace than seems necessary to me, but Dunstable's *Salve scema sanctitatis* closes the disc in show-stopping style, less contemplative than The Hilliard Ensemble's reading but scarcely less detailed. (It made me wish that there had been just a bit more four-voice music, in fact.) A welcome feature is the couple of tracks illustrating *faburden*, a technique for improvising polyphony that was extremely common (I hope that they will do more of this and become freer in doing so); another is the originality of the cover art. There might be more to say about this, yet I must here join the ensemble in saluting the memory of their regular collaborator Philip Weller, whose death late last year leaves his many friends bereft and music deprived of a gifted and faithful servant. **Fabrice Fitch**



A celebration of both choir and building: Andrew Nethsingha directs the St John's Choir in Cambridge on the 150th anniversary of the College Chapel

'Sol y vida'

Barroso Brazil **Cardillo** Core 'ngrato
de Curtis Non ti scordar di me. Torna a
Surriento. Voce 'e notte **Gardel** El día que
me quieras **Gastaldon** Musica proibita **Grieg**
T'estimo **Hermida** Lela **Lara** Granada **Parra**
Gracias a la vida **Piazzolla** María de Buenos
Aires - Yo soy María **Sorozábal** La tabernera
del puerto - No puede ser **Tosti** Marechiaré.
Non t'amo più **Traditional** La Llorona. Vai
lavar a cara

Elīna Garanča *mez* **Gran Canaria Philharmonic**
Orchestra / Karel Mark Chichon
DG © 483 6217GH (66' • DDD)



So it's vacation time for the Latvian mezzo. Sun, sea and seduction. True love may never run smooth but it always sounds better in Spanish or Italian. Garanča's selection of flamboyant Mediterranean and Latin American songs is a predictably good fit for her ripe and beguiling timbre. The arrangements and delivery here prioritise

the lushness and amplitude of the settings – the content may indulge déjà vu-like in a recurring cycle of love and loss (which may account for the absence of texts and translations – a pity) but the writers, composers and these performers take great delight in succumbing again and again to their intoxication.

Garanča kick-starts with the inevitable 'Granada' replete with castanets, chirpy woodwinds and a sweeping invocation of the Alhambra. I like the switch from that to solo guitar – José Maria Gallardo del Rey – for the traditional 'La Llorona', which is confidential, moody and sultry, and definitely belongs to the shadows. As does Cardillo's highly emotive 'Core 'ngrato', which more than does what it says on the tin. Violeta Parra's 'Gracias a la vida' feels like an old friend, as does the return to Sorrento 'Torna a Surriento' and the ubiquitous 'Brazil', whose pulsations come with the promise of the next summer romance. Perhaps the arrival of a tall, dark stranger from Brazil.

Everything here (not least the filmic arrangements) is overheated in the best

sense. The incongruity of Grieg's 'T'estimo' – 'I love you', the starting or finishing point in all these numbers – is still wondrous even if it does belong to chillier climes and sounds odd in Catalan, and right at the heart of the recital is Tosti's gorgeous 'Non t'amo più', which Garanča turns into a self-contained drama of its own. Harmida's 'Lela' is the most sumptuous sweetmeat.

And just when you were thinking you might overdose on all this lovelorn romanticism there's Piazzolla's edgy, fiery tango 'Yo soy María' from *María de Buenos Aires*, where Garanča's rasping defiance à la Carmen excitingly exploits the darkest recesses of her bottom register.

Her sheer joy in choosing and singing this repertoire is tangible. A holiday romance it may be, but enjoy it while it lasts. **Edward Seckerson**

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WHAT NEXT?

Do you have a favourite piece of music and want to explore further? Our monthly feature suggests some musical journeys that venture beyond the most familiar works, with some recommended versions. This month, **Richard Whitehouse**'s point of departure is ...

Debussy's String Quartet in G minor, Op 10 (1893)

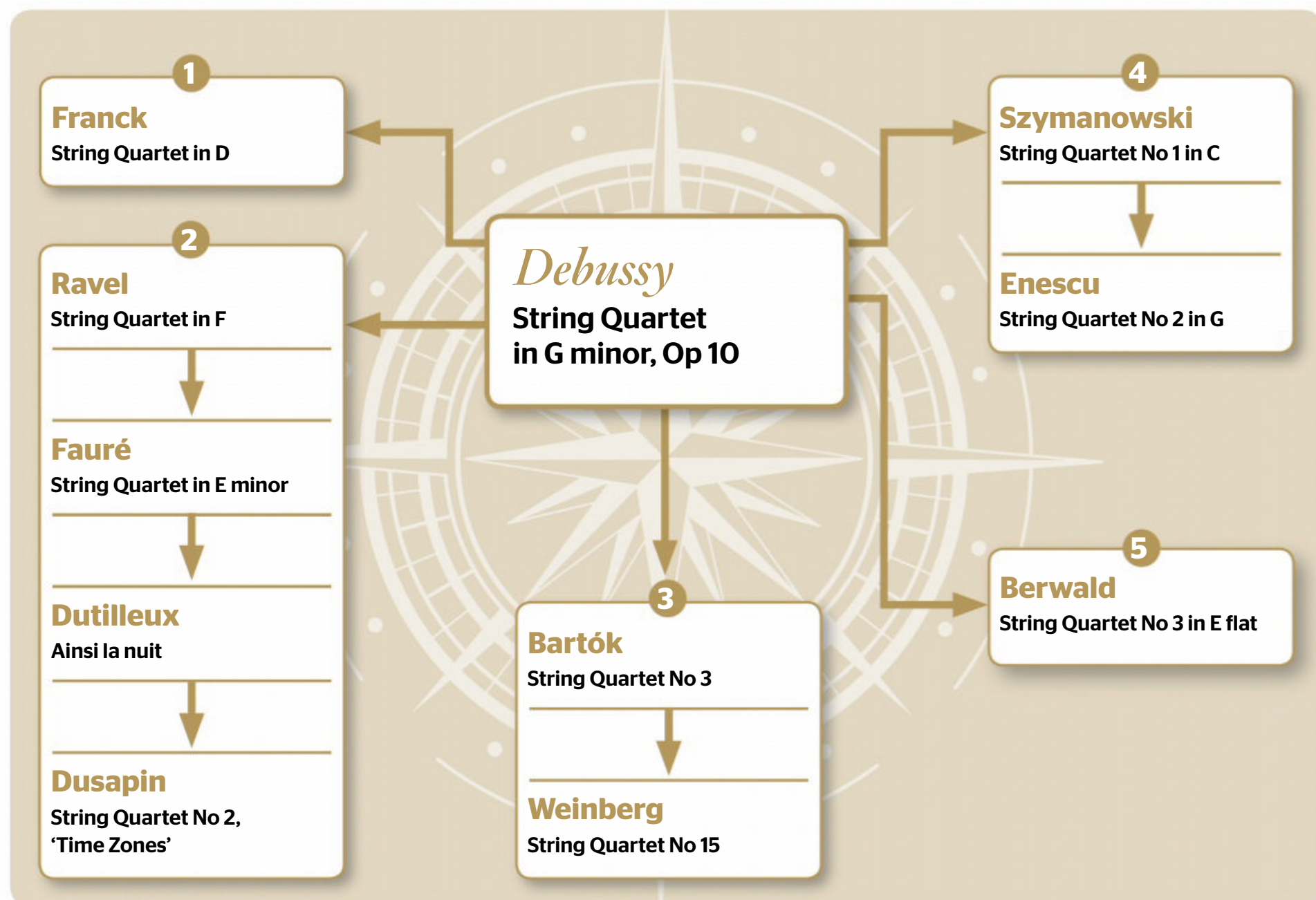
Written in 1893 and premiered in Paris by the Ysaÿe Quartet on December 29 that year, Debussy's String Quartet had come about in the wake of his abandoned opera *Rodrigue et Chimène* and prior to his starting work on *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Composing such an inherently abstract work in the midst of large-scale dramatic projects might appear an act of defiance, but Debussy was intent on having it both ways. On the one hand, his quartet adopts a four-movement design (albeit with the scherzo placed second) whose lineage stretches back at least as far as Haydn; conversely, the systematic transferral of motifs between movements ensures a formal integration, and therefore

unity, that had rarely been attempted in this genre. Debussy wrote no further quartets, but his solitary example has had far-reaching influence – whether in terms of its classicist connections or its subtle yet significant formal innovations.

● Melos Quartet (DG, 11/79)

1 *The French ancestry*

Franck String Quartet in D (1890) Debussy took his conceptual cue from the String Quartet with which César Franck crowned a decade of innovative large-scale chamber and orchestral works.



Even more than in those earlier pieces, the formal unity achieved across its four movements epitomises the process of cyclic transformation Franck derived from Liszt and thereby influenced a generation of composers. Its deft intermingling of modal and chromatic harmony was to prove hardly less significant. This was also Franck's sole work in the genre.

● **Fitzwilliam Quartet** (Decca Eloquence, 5/80)

2 *The French succession*

Ravel String Quartet in F (1903) Written a decade after Debussy's, and premiered in 1904, Ravel's only string quartet was criticised by those who saw the younger composer as Debussy's epigone. Ravel may follow his predecessor as to formal layout, but his piece differs in its classical poise and lucidity, with thematic links confined to the finale and an avoidance of harmonic ambiguity. A decade later, it had become the more often played – and remains so to this day.

● **Melos Quartet** (DG, 11/79)

Fauré String Quartet in E minor (1924) Less than enthused about the Ravel quartet at its premiere, its dedicatee Fauré waited a further two decades before writing *his* only string quartet – his final work and his first chamber piece without piano. It pursues an oblique line of evolution from the Franck, its three movements evincing a terse motivic unity which underpins the austere yet ethereal expression. Premiered posthumously, it has now become a respected rather than a popular addition to the repertoire.

● **Ebène Quartet** (Erato, 12/08)

Dutilleux Ainsi la nuit (1976) The dominance first of neoclassicism then of modernism in French musical culture meant that the Debussy lineage had few genuine successors prior to Dutilleux's magisterial (and again, only) quartet, composed 1973-76. By this stage he had abandoned self-contained movements, the piece unfolding as a sequence of seven continuous sections that emerge as a cumulative whole in parallel to the music's ever expanding tonal palette. The result intrigues and tantalises in equal measure.

● **Juilliard Quartet** (Sony, 3/94)

Dusapin String Quartet No 2, 'Time Zones' (1989) Although hailing from the tradition of Varèse and Xenakis, Pascal Dusapin had assumed the mantle of Debussy even before starting his cycle of (seven to date) string quartets. Subtitled *Time Zones*, the second of these comprises 24 continuous pieces (each lasting an average of 90 seconds) that chart a course through temporal and spatial dimensions. Pithy and provocative by turns, this is music whose motivic and expressive connections are essentially Debussian.

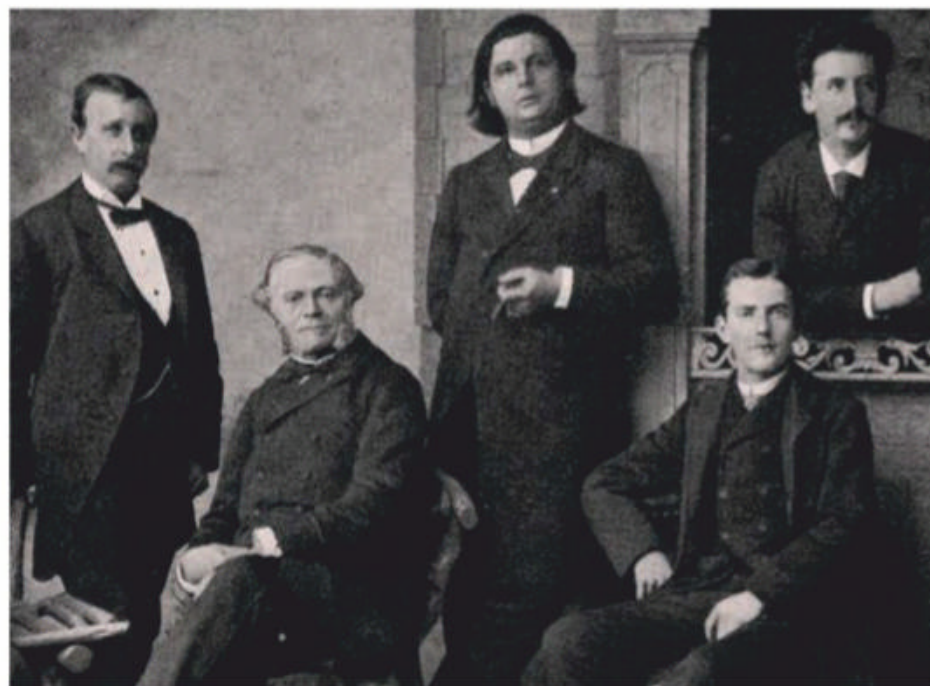
● **Arditti Quartet** (Aeon, 12/10)

3 *Formal advances*

Bartók String Quartet No 3 (1927) Debussy's formal advances centred largely on orchestral works; he left others to take these up with the string quartet, not least Bartók, whose Third Quartet is both an elaborated sonata form and a compacted four-movement design which plays continuously for around 15 minutes. Its stark emotional contrasts are intensified by recourse to a minimum of motivic elements – ensuring an inevitability in its progress from speculative beginnings to confrontational close.

● **Végh Quartet** (Orfeo, 11/73)

Weinberg String Quartet No 15 (1979) The diversity of Weinberg's 17 string quartets has only recently become evident, notably that of Quartet No 15, whose nine brief movements



The Ysaÿe Quartet who premiered the Debussy with César Franck (seated left)

merge into a totality almost in spite of themselves. From fugitive beginnings, via a central culmination, to a similarly inward close, the work's gnomic and fractured progress has been described as music in search of an ending, but it could easily be heard as music attempting to return full circle to its own origins.

● **Danel Quartet** (CPO)

4 *Formal consolidation*

Szymanowski String Quartet No 1 in C (1917) The onset of the First World War found Szymanowski leavening the Austro-German density of his earlier music with Impressionist elements drawn primarily from Debussy. A particular example of this is seen in his First Quartet, which combines fluidity of form with a tonal freedom most marked by the interplay of keys in its third movement. Szymanowski had intended this movement as the quartet's scherzo, but sensing that a subsequent 'finale' would be superfluous in this context, he instead allowed the work to remain complete in its ostensible incompleteness.

● **Prometeo Quartet** (Brilliant Classics)

Enescu String Quartet No 2 in G (1951)

Enescu's later works had long gestations, not least his Second Quartet, drafted in the early 1920s but only finished three decades later. Few works might appear more classical than this one in four movements lasting around 25 minutes, but Enescu's reappraisal of form and questing tonal trajectory witness an evolution no less profound than that of his more radical contemporaries. Not for nothing did his protégé Yehudi Menuhin describe Enescu as a composer for the 21st century.

● **Ad Libitum Quartet** (Naxos, 5/01)

5 *Possible beginnings*

Berwald String Quartet No 3 in E flat (1849) Debussy is unlikely to have heard Berwald's Third Quartet (published posthumously in 1887) prior to writing his own work. Yet its formal integration – a central Scherzo inserted within a slow movement, itself inserted within an opening movement that returns at the close – and tonal ingenuity should have secured it a place in the repertoire. Avoiding Romantic excess, Berwald hit upon the blueprint for a new Classicism such as few acknowledge even today.

● **Yggdrasil Quartet** (BIS, 2/97)

Available to stream at Qobuz, Apple Music and Spotify

Opera



Richard Bratby relishes Kálmán's very first operetta:

'Demanding textual purity in operetta is like seeking an "authentic" recipe for goulash: rather beside the point' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 92**



Hugo Shirley listens to the tenor of the late Johan Botha:

'The voice is focused and well supported: Botha's well-schooled technique can be heard in every phrase' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 95**

Bielawa

Vireo: The Spiritual Biography of a Witch's Accuser

Rowen Sabala *sop* Vireo
Gregory Purnhagen *sng* Priest/Doctor/Lawyer
Maria Lazarova *mez* Mother
Emma MacKenzie *sop* Caroline
Laurie Rubin *mez* Voice/Witch/Pernette
Ryan Glover *ten* Raphael
Kirsten Sollek *contr* Cow/Lion
Deborah Voigt *sop* Queen of Sweden
Matthias Bossi *drums* Drummer
Michael Parker Harley *bar* Farmer
Jennifer Koh *vn* Violinist in the Snow
Matt Marks *sng* Policeman
Musicians include Kronos Quartet, San Francisco Girls Chorus, Alarm Will Sound and American Contemporary Music Ensemble / Lisa Bielawa
 Orange Mountain Ⓢ ② OMM7017 (143' • DDD)
 Includes bonus DVD



The origins of Lisa Bielawa's video opera *Vireo: The Spiritual*

Biography of a Witch's Accuser reach back to the 1990s. As a student, Bielawa (b1968) became fascinated at the way young women were misunderstood and mistreated through time – usually by controlling groups of males – as either witches, the possessed or mentally ill. *Vireo's* 12 'episodes' were premiered during a series of television broadcasts in 2017, then made available for online streaming. Each episode has differing vocal and instrumental requirements – for the supporting cast and accompaniment, the core roles (Vireo, her Mother, the Priest/Doctor/Lawyer, his assistant Raphael) being constant – and were shot in different locations from California to New York, including a farm (watch out for Kirsten Sollek's wonderful turn as a soon-to-be-slaughtered cow), a snowbound car, Alcatraz prison, a forest and a monastery, deploying more than 350 performers.

The action centres on 14-year-old Vireo (sung with disarming relentlessness by

Rowen Sabala, 16 when shooting started but 18 by the end), who hears voices and experiences visions of other times and places. Her personal journey is cumulatively compelling as she intersects these diverse situations – among others late medieval Reims, 17th-century Salem, a 19th-century asylum, the Swedish Royal Court (featuring a delightful cameo from Deborah Voigt as the Queen), present-day school and prison – experiencing physically the consequences of what her mother calls her 'genius'. Here, she is prodded with needles to determine whether she is a witch; there, she is subject to psychiatry; in another, the 'diagnosis' is possession by witchcraft. Her identification of a local woman's voice (Pernette's) with her visions proves terminal for the unfortunate accused. In each timeframe, Vireo is separated from her mother, leaving her vulnerable to the baleful influence of Caroline (menacingly played by Emma MacKenzie).

The DVD sound is rather studio-bound, unsurprisingly (less so on CD, especially through headphones), but Charles Otte's splendid production more than compensates. The video is essential to following the time-shifting story as no synopsis is provided, with the libretto only available online. Despite being well sung and played, Bielawa's recitative-like vocal lines and primarily chamber-musical accompaniments sound of a muchness whether one is in a French forest (the setting for the opening section, which has been recorded before – 5/18^{US}), Victorian asylum, Sweden or Alcatraz. *Vireo's* main impact is visual so it is good to hear that Bielawa is working on a live version with a shorter duration (and, presumably, fewer performers) for 2020. **Guy Rickards**

Donizetti • Verdi

Donizetti Lucia di Lammermoor – Tomba degli avi miei ... Fra poco a me ricovero.
 Maria di Rohan – Alma soave e cara. Poliuto – Veleno è l'aura ch'io respiro ... Fu macchiato l'onor mio ... Sfolgorò divino raggio

Verdi Un ballo in maschera – Forse la soglia attinse ... Ma se m'è forza perduto. Il corsaro – Ah si, ben dite ... Tutto pareva sorridere ... Pronti siate a seguirmi. I due Foscari – Notte, perpetua notte ... Non maledirmi. Ernani – Odi il voto ... Sprezzo la vita. La forza del destino – Qual sangue sparsi ... S'affronti la morte. Luisa Miller – Oh! fede negar potessi ... Quando le sere al placido. Oberto – Ciel, che feci! ... Ciel pietoso. Rigoletto – La donna è mobile
Michael Fabiano *ten* **London Voices; London Philharmonic Orchestra / Enrique Mazzola**
 Pentatone Ⓢ PTC5186 750 (57' • DDD/DSD)
 Includes texts and translations



In some respects, Michael Fabiano was famous before he was famous. In

2009 he appeared in Susan Froemke's feature documentary film *The Audition*, which followed the progress of participants in the Metropolitan Opera's 2007 National Council Auditions. It wasn't a film that did him many favours, revealing a pent-up young man driven by fierce ambition. Even on PBS's website about the film, the American tenor is referred to as 'a fiery 22-year-old grappling with his inner demons'. The film ends as Fabiano is announced as one of the six winners – cue much fist-clenching – and he has gone on, like his colleagues Jamie Barton, Angela Meade and Amber Wagner, to perform at the Met.

He now releases his first album, a disc of Donizetti and Verdi arias on Pentatone which would seem to be an ideal fit for his voice. It's the sort of repertoire that José Carreras sang early in his career and, at his best, Fabiano is able to replicate the Spanish tenor's honeyed tone. However, these moments are far too rare in an album where Fabiano slams the accelerator hard in a turbocharged approach that borders on the obsessive. In 'Fu macchiato l'onor mio' from Donizetti's *Poliuto*, I was reminded



Nicola Vaccaj's *Giulietta e Romeo*, live from Martina Franca in Italy, proves revelatory – see review on page 93

of Fabiano's performance of the title-role at Glyndebourne in 2015, when the tenor attempted to out-Corelli Franco Corelli, pushing his voice loudly in an acoustic that just doesn't require it. There's that same volatile tension here. Did he learn nothing from that experience? Top notes are often forced so hard that they become ugly.

I have heard Fabiano on more restrained form. He made a thrilling sound as Corrado in Verdi's *Il corsaro* in Valencia last year and his handling of the aria 'Tutto pareva sorridere' here is some of the best singing on the disc, but come the cabaletta, he's far too aggressive. In a series of online video clips to explain his repertoire choices, Fabiano identifies with some of the characters, but comments such as 'I like to fight for people I care about' sound more like he's planning a move into politics.

There are some interesting choices here, though, such as the original St Petersburg aria for Don Alvaro in *La forza del destino*, 'Qual sangue sparsi'. But sung at a relentless *forte*, it's not an easy listen. Then there's *Ernani*. Verdi, at the behest of Rossini, wrote an insertion aria 'Odi il voto' for the tenor Nicola Ivanov, singing the role of Ernani in

Parma in 1844. It is followed by a rabble-rousing cabaletta which is clearly a precursor of Manrico's 'Di quella pira' in *Il trovatore*.

Fabiano has worked with Enrique Mazzola before and the Italian conductor and the London Philharmonic Orchestra support him as sensitively as the singer allows. **Mark Pullinger**

von Einem

Der Prozess

Michael Laurenz *ten* Josef K
Jochen Schmeckenbecher *bar*
 Inspector/Priest/Factory Owner
Matthäus Schmidlechner *ten*
 Student/Vice-President
Jörg Schneider *ten* Titorelli
Lars Woldt *bass* Examining Magistrate/Flogger
Johannes Kammler *bar* Court Usher/Lawyer
Tilman Rönnebeck *bass* ... Chief Clerk/Uncle Albert
Ilse Eerens *sop*
 Court Usher's Wife/Leni/Humpbacked Girl
Anke Vondung *mez* Frau Grubach
Alexander Hüttner *ten* Young Fellow
ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra /
HK Gruber

Capriccio © ② C5358 (104' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Felsenreitschule, Salzburg,
 August 13 & 14, 2018

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Literaturoper is what German writers (not uncritically) named a growing

school of 20th-century composers who set librettos taken from compressed but hardly altered literary classics. The latter – written by authors from Büchner to Friedrich Dürrenmatt via Kafka – were the mainstay of Gottfried von Einem's output for the stage.

In *Der Prozess*, an early 1950s opera after Kafka's bleak, slightly surreal novel (*The Trial* in English), the composer provides an object lesson in how to set a potentially intractable subject. Not only does very little 'happen' in the novel (until the anti-hero's literally last-minute unseen execution) but the text – although written in the third person – is a stream of consciousness and dialogue from a single central character.

Unfazed by this challenge, von Einem set to work with a whole list of unbeatable standbys of musical theatre. These put to flight the less than dramatic prospect of chains of recitative in his trademark almost neo-atonal style. Tempos and

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Kálmán's *Ein Herbstmanöver*, his first operetta, glows with local colour and sparkling comedy – see review on page 92

orchestration were consistently varied so that a number opera emerged around the central character Josef K's continuous encounters. The few female characters (five in a cast list of well over 20) were made the most of to contrast with an unchanging succession of male voices. And, without ever being naturalistic, music of contrasting moods and styles (even dance music) was dropped into the basically gloomy and dark setting – Prague Noir takes on overtones of New York which could approach, say, Bernstein's almost contemporary music for *West Side Story*. The piece overall was very much the von Einem who sounds like a less acerbic Mahler or a more tonal Berg. All these factors helped to ease or at least obscure one remaining problem of the piece – there was a little (actually quite a lot) too much of Josef K and he had very little interesting to sing per se, even if his role was not exactly easy. But that concentration on one was the essential heart of Kafka's novel.

The new recording comes from concert performances at last year's Salzburg Festival celebrating the composer's centenary. It's led with great gusto and accuracy by one of his leading pupils. Gruber is predictably unafraid of the more modern elements and (in an accompanying note) compares his old master's approach to that of John Adams. The singing cast is strong and accurate too.

The collector in you may be intrigued by Orfeo's takeover of the 1953 world-premiere broadcast led by Karl Böhm, with Max Lorenz and Lisa della Casa leading the cast. It's well rehearsed and fluent but the VPO sound just a little afraid of the noisier climaxes and syncopations. Gruber now, obviously with superior sound, provides a better document of von Einem's score. **Mike Ashman**

Comparative version:

Böhm (2/96) (ORFE) C393 952I

Granados

Goyescas

Nancy Fabiola Herrera *sop* Rosario

Gustavo Peña *ten* Fernando

Lidia Vinyes Curtis *mez* Pepa

José Antonio López *bar* Paquiro

BBC Singers and Symphony Orchestra /

Josep Pons

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2609 (60' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Barbican Hall, London,

January 19, 2018

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



In purely dramatic terms, *Goyescas* doesn't amount to much: its plot is threadbare and its characters are little more than stereotypes. The music, however, is glorious, with most of its thematic material

drawn from Granados's two sets of Goya-inspired piano pieces. Indeed, Fernando Periquet had to do quite a bit of retrofitting in order to write the libretto, and as a result intelligibility can be an issue, particularly in the elaborate choral writing.

This performance was recorded in concert at the Barbican – *Goyescas* is rarely staged but the hour-long opera is well-suited to the concert hall – and is excellent in every respect. José Antonio López oozes braggadocio as the *majo* Paquiro, while also applying an oily veneer to his handsome baritone as he goes about his various flirtations. Lidia Vinyes Curtis sings his companion, Pepa, with equivalent hauteur.

As the aristocratic Rosario, Nancy Fabiola Herrera sounds neither as youthful nor as poignantly ingenuous as María Bayo on a superb studio account from Madrid (Auvidis, 5/97), but her creamy tone suggests regal bearing and her entreaties in the love duet convey considerable ardour. Similarly, while Ramón Vargas's Fernando (captain of the guards and Rosario's lover) has greater sweetness and ease, the tight vibrato in Gustavo Peña's upper register gives his voice an attractive glint and he phrases intelligently, playing effectively with light and shade. The pair's final scene, after Fernando is killed by Paquiro in a duel, is touchingly tender.

Josep Pons wrings a fair amount of drama from the score. Note, for instance,

how slowly and inexorably he builds tension in the second tableaux, as Fernando and Paquiro become entangled, keeping the volume down until their long-simmering conflict finally boils over. I prefer the somewhat earthier sound of the choral singing on the Audivis disc but the BBC Singers do a fine job here, and the BBC Symphony Orchestra play with both rhythmic vitality and tonal refinement. I only wish the recording had greater presence. The solo voices come across naturally and with sufficient impact but some choral and orchestral detail is lost in the Barbican's sonic glare. Nevertheless, this is a most enjoyable disc and I have no hesitation in recommending it.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Kálmán

Ein Herbstmanöver

Harald Pfeiffer *sng* Feldmarschallleutnant von Lohonnay
Marie Seidler *mez* Treszka
Christiane Boesiger *sop* Baronin Riza von Marbach
Grga Peroš *bar* Oberleutnant von Lörenthy
Tomi Wendt *bar* Wallerstein
Clemens Kerschbaumer *ten* Marosi
Rainer Hustedt *sng* Kurt
Rainer Domke *sng* Bence
Giessen State Theatre Chorus; Giessen Philharmonic Orchestra / Michael Hofstetter
 Oehms © OC977 (79' • DDD)
 Includes synopsis



You can't have Viennese operetta without gold braid, frogging and

moustachioed cavalry officers, and Kálmán's 'military operetta' *Ein Herbstmanöver* is in a soldiering tradition that embraces Suppé's *Light Cavalry* and Oscar Straus's *The Chocolate Soldier*. Putting the Habsburg army on stage was as obvious a move for Austro-Hungarian composers as it was for Gilbert & Sullivan to climb aboard *HMS Pinafore*, and in fact *Ein Herbstmanöver* (*Tatárjárás* in Budapest and *The Gay Hussars* on Broadway) was Kálmán's very first operetta. Its success prompted him to move to Vienna.

But make no mistake, it's fresh off the puszta. A regiment of Hussars on autumn manoeuvres is camping on the country estate of the recently widowed Baroness Riza. But her old flame Lörenthy is on the staff: entanglements, both romantic and military, ensue, and Kálmán's score glows with Hungarian colour, fizzy comedy numbers and long-breathed, bittersweet waltzes. From the fiery overture to the

sudden arrival of a gypsy band, it's easy to see why Vienna should have been swept away by such a fresh and colourful new voice.

Amid a spate of recent Kálmán releases, this is a clear winner. It's taken from a 2018 staging in Giessen, and the producers re-examined the original 1908 performance material before making a few changes of their own. The trouser role of Marosi is taken by a tenor (Clemens Kerschbaumer), two numbers from another show have been inserted and other items have been re-ordered and cut. The spoken dialogue has largely been omitted. Still, demanding textual purity in operetta is like seeking an 'authentic' recipe for goulash: rather beside the point. What matters is how good it tastes.

And as long as you're not in the market for Staatsoper opulence, this tastes great. Christiane Boesiger as Riza has enough vocal richness to be seductive (with just a hint of sour cream); as Lörenthy, Grga Peroš has a sunny, matinee-idol baritone. They're a charming pair and they're both at their best in their half-melancholy, half-rapturous near-duets, floating the ends of phrases and uncoiling the long finale to Act 1 with tenderness and poise. Kerschbaumer is a lively light tenor, Marie Seidler makes a sparky Treszka and Tomi Wendt is a lot more musical than he needs to be in the comedy role of Cadet Wallerstein.

If anyone deserves to be mentioned in dispatches, though, it's the conductor, Michael Hofstetter, who launches the Overture with moustache-twirling élan and has an unerring sense – as vital to Kálmán as a Viennese lilt is to Strauss – for the precise moment when a csárdás starts, imperceptibly, to accelerate. His panache is matched by his sensitivity in the slower numbers: for an escapist comedy, *Ein Herbstmanöver* is surprisingly poignant, and I found the mixture captivating. So it pains me to say that the glossy booklet contains no libretto and a worse-than-useless synopsis. Still, Kálmán's score is so piquant and these performances are so zestful and affectionate that I urge you to enjoy it regardless. **Richard Bratby**

Monteverdi

L'incoronazione di Poppea

Helen Sherman *mez* Poppea/Fortuna
Jake Arditti *counterten* Nerone
Natalie Christie Peluso *sop* Ottavia/Drusilla/Virtù
Owen Willetts *counterten* Ottone
David Greco *bar* Seneca
Kanen Breen *ten* Arnalta/Nutrice
Roberta Diamond *sop* Amore
Pinchgut Opera; Orchestra of the Antipodes / Erin Helyard *hpd*

Pinchgut Live © ② PGO10 (150' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation

Recorded live



Pinchgut Opera's 2017 staged production has several singers doubling up in

multiple roles, which is likely the same sort of accepted pragmatism that was part of working life in the first public opera theatres in mid-17th-century Venice. It seems apt that Helen Sherman's wily Poppea is foreshadowed by the same singer in the prologue performing Fortuna's robust criticism of Virtù, who is in turn sung imperiously by Natalie Christie Peluso in anticipation of her reappearance as Ottavia. It also paves the way for the triumph of Roberta Diamond's impish Amore in both contexts. Jake Arditti's singing veers between seductive and volatile (arguably appropriate for Nerone), whereas Owen Willetts conveys Ottone's anguish and indecision. David Greco captures both Seneca's obsequiousness with Ottavia and the dignity of his suicide, its pathos supported by editorial violins not unlike those in Monteverdi's late Venetian concertato madrigals – an aesthetic connection between that genre and the response of the philosopher's friends that is realised intelligently in this astute performance. Kanen Breen's drag-act Arnalta is entertainingly over-the-top, albeit not very distinct audibly from his turn as Ottavia's Nutrice (and Arnalta's lullaby over the sleeping Poppea might have afforded to be sung more sweetly).

Erin Helyard directs from the keyboard with a shrewd eye on shaping, sonorities and pacing. The Orchestra of the Antipodes field single strings; cello, viola da gamba, lirone and violone on the bottom line ensure that Peter Holman's reconstructed ritornellos resonate with plenty of depth. An assorted continuo group of two keyboards, harp, archlute, theorbo and guitar is attuned to the events and personalities in the drama. Additional cornetts, recorders and trumpet are applied with relative discretion (all of them are played by the versatile Matthew Manchester, so only one additional colour at a time). The sporadic use of percussion is less persuasive.

There are a lot of cuts: five scenes are deleted entirely and several others are shortened. The repositioning of Arnalta's 'Oggi sara Poppea' (Act 3 scene 6) after Ottavia's 'Addio Roma' (scene 5) reduces

the emotional isolation of the repudiated empress's banishment. Nevertheless, this warts-and-all live recording illustrates the spirited irony and panache of this enigmatic masterpiece. **David Vickers**

Spontini

Olimpie (1826 version)

Karina Gauvin *sop*.....Olimpie
Kate Aldrich *mez*.....Statira
Mathias Vidal *ten*.....Cassandre
Josef Wagner *bass-bar*.....Antigone
Patrick Bolleire *bass*.....L'Hiérophante/Priest
Philippe Souvague *bar*.....Hermas
Flemish Radio Choir; Le Cercle de l'Harmonie / Jérémie Rhorer

Bru Zane © ② BZ1035 (135' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Spontini, the favourite of Napoleon and Josephine, had his greatest successes with *La vestale* and

Fernand Cortez, staged at

the Opéra in 1807 and 1809 respectively. By the time *Olimpie* was premiered, on December 22, 1819, the world had moved on. The Parisian public had lost its taste for neo-Gluckian tragedy and the production was taken off after seven performances. Spontini then took up an appointment at the Prussian court: *Olimpia*, translated by ETA Hoffmann, was a success in Berlin and elsewhere in Europe, but a new production in Paris launched on February 29, 1826 – the version recorded here – lasted a mere five performances.

Hoffmann did more than translate the opera. The original, based on a tragedy by Voltaire, has Cassander responsible for the death of Alexander the Great and the wounding of his wife Statira; their daughter Olympias, who loves and is loved by Cassander, commits suicide along with

her mother, the opera ending with the apotheosis of Alexander and both women. In the Berlin version, which became Paris mark 2, Cassander is accused by Statira, but the true villain is Antigonus; he is the only one to die. (In Voltaire's play, Cassander dies too.)

The setting is in and around the Temple of Diana at Ephesus. Statira and Olympias are living under assumed names. When mother and daughter are reunited, the former fulminating against Cassander, Antigonus – who also loves Olympias – arrests his rival. Cassander escapes and launches an attack with his men. Antigonus, mortally wounded, admits to the murder of Alexander. Statira is proclaimed queen and the innocent Cassander marries Olympias. The story provided Spontini with plenty of opportunity for spectacle. Ceremonies in each of the three acts feature the chorus; it's a pity that the Ballets and the Marche triomphale are omitted. The opera had the reputation of being noisy: even Berlioz, whose admiration of Spontini was second only to his devotion to Gluck, commented on 'the sundry useless flourishes ... so much so that the instrumentation is at times heavy and confused'. It's true that the trombones are much in evidence and the tam-tam has a field day, but Jérémie Rhorer keeps his excellent orchestra under control.

The music for the soloists is well characterised. Statira's scene in Act 2 begins and ends in F minor; in the middle comes 'Implacables tyrans' in D major, vigorous in the manner of Orestes' 'Dieux qui me poursuivez' in Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*. Interestingly, Antigonus's dying curse – powerfully sung by Josef Wagner – is similar to Caspar's in Weber's *Der Freischütz*, which was premiered in Berlin in June 1821, a month after Spontini's opera. In Act 1, Cassander's turmoil is represented by minor-key dotted figures that lead to a delicate prayer and firm

resolution in the major. Mathias Vidal is everything you could wish for. Karina Gauvin and Kate Aldrich, both excellent, have such similar voices that it's hard to tell them apart, but of course they blend beautifully in their recognition duet, 'N'auriez-vous d'une mère aucun ressouvenir?'. As the Hierophant presiding over the ceremonies Patrick Bolleire is sonorously authoritative.

A warm recommendation, then. But, unusually for Bru Zane, the ancillary material shows a want of care. After announcing that the spelling *Olympie* will signify the 1819 version and *Olimpie* its 1826 counterpart, the translation gets it wrong several times. In the libretto, the Hierophant's 'À la voix de ses dieux' is wrongly attributed to Antigonus. And the latter's air 'Auguste épouse d'un héros', mentioned in the analysis of the opera, is missing from the recording. As for the translation itself, you might wince at 'plethoric' or 'caducity'; but I was glad to be introduced to 'fustigate' (look it up).

Richard Lawrence

Vaccaj



Giulietta e Romeo

Leonardo Cortellazzi *ten*.....Capellio
Leonor Bonilla *sop*.....Giulietta
Raffaella Lupinacci *mez*.....Romeo
Paoletta Marrocu *sop*.....Adelia
Vasa Stajkic *bar*.....Tebaldo
Christian Senn *bar*.....Lorenzo

Chorus of the Teatro Municipale, Piacenza; Orchestra Academy of the Teatro alla Scala, Milan / Sesto Quatrini

Stage director **Cecilia Ligorio**

Video director **Matteo Ricchetti**

Dynamic © ② CDS7832; © ② **DVD** 37832;

© **Blu-ray** 57832 (151' • DDD • 161' • NTSC • 16:9 •

DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Palazzo Ducale, Martina Franca, Italy, July 15-31, 2018

CD includes synopsis, libretto and translation;

Blu-ray and DVD include synopsis

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The ordering of the names might give a clue: like Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, Nicola Vaccaj's *Giulietta e Romeo* (1825)

takes the story of the famous star-crossed lovers from sources other than Shakespeare. The basics are the same but the fateful final scene is differently prepared. Felice Romani's libretto for Vaccaj (1790-1848) concentrates more on the feuding families (with the tenor Capellio doing plenty of rabble rousing) in its exposition than on the burgeoning romance between the two title-characters: they've long since met by the time we first see them together on stage some 45 minutes into the first act.

Vaccaj, awkwardly situated in musical history between Rossini and the *bel canto* duo of Donizetti and Bellini, is a very fine composer and this release (the second audio recording and the first filmed version) reveals *Giulietta e Romeo* – the only one of his operas not to have fully sunk into obscurity – to be an excellent, highly effective piece. There are echoes of Rossini in some of the busy early ensembles, and Bellini's *Capuleti* comes to mind in some of the elegant vocal writing, as well as the horn solos (though here it's Romeo who has one to introduce his Act 2 aria 'È questo il loco, ella qui posa'). But much of the score, as well as the work's far from conventional formal design, seems to look forward to Verdi.

Here it also receives a performance that does it justice, generally better sung and more sensitively conducted than Bongiovanni's previous release, recorded in 1996. Cecilia Ligorio's production on the broad outside stage of Martina Franca's Palazzo Ducale has some superfluous touches – extras roam the early scenes in wolf masks, for example – but tells the story clearly, shifting between scenes cleverly. And she brings out some wonderful performances from a terrific leading couple. Raffaella Lupinacci's characterful, fruity mezzo is matched by detailed and lively acting, and Leonor Bonilla brings a bright, elegant soprano and oodles of charm to Giulietta. I defy anyone not to find their tomb scene deeply moving – down as much to their excellent performances as to Vaccaj's score.

The rest of the cast is more than decent, with Leonardo Cortellazzi singing powerfully as Capellio, even though the character's unlikely swing to remorse in Act 2 represents one of the work's weaker

moments. Veteran soprano Paoletta Marrocu offers a touching star turn as Adelia, Giulietta's mother. There's plenty of fine playing from the Orchestra Accademia Teatro alla Scala under conductor Sesto Quatrini, who clearly believes in the work. Give this excellent release a go (either on CD or, even better, on DVD or Blu-ray) and I'd imagine you will too. **Hugo Shirley**

Comparative version:

Severini (BONG) GB2195/6

Wagner

Siegfried

Simon O'Neill *ten* Siegfried
Iain Paterson *bass-bar* Wanderer
Rachel Nicholls *sop* Brünnhilde
Gerhard Siegel *ten* Mime
Martin Winkler *bass-bar* Alberich
Anna Larsson *contr* Erda
Clive Bayley *bass* Fafner
Malin Christensson *sop* Woodbird
Hallé Orchestra / Sir Mark Elder

Hallé ® ④ CDHLD7551 (4h 21' • DDD)

Recorded live at The Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, June 2 & 3, 2018

Includes synopsis; libretto and translation available from halle.co.uk



This new *Siegfried* completes Mark Elder and the Hallé's *Ring*, nine years in the

making from concerts in Manchester and Edinburgh to record release. This is not, of course, the first time that a symphony orchestra without regular experience of work in an opera theatre's pit has done this. The Vienna Symphony were responsible for the earliest complete single-project *Ring* cycle one can now collect on disc (1948-49 under Rudolf Moralt); Furtwängler and the RAI Rome followed a few years later; and the most recent rival to the Hallé's set (the Hong Kong Philharmonic under Jaap van Zweden) was completed only last year. And that's not to mention the Berlin Philharmonic under Karajan (studio-recorded first, then performed in the theatre), Ascher Fisch with the Seattle Symphony or the two cycles (Dresden Staatskapelle and Berlin Radio Symphony) under Marek Janowski. A long time ago (although within living memory) a concert-based symphony orchestra was often considered a better option for recording Wagner's tricky part-writing; nowadays we tend to prefer the natural practical experience of a band used to playing with singers.

One of Elder's principal achievements in this cycle – and nowhere more so than in this newcomer – is that he has got this special sheen of stage experience from his symphony orchestra. It's more than just a question of thoroughly accomplished technical playing; it's a question of living with and feeling the drama of these scores through the colour and pace of their rendering of the score. For that alone these recordings deserve a competitive place in today's catalogues from which you can now access around 40 recordings of the complete cycle. Elder has also deepened and refined his own handling of Wagner, balancing a Reginald Goodall-like quest for detail – and integrating some quite generous tempos – with a Furtwängler- or Solti-like attention to the drama.

The casting, as throughout the cycle, shows awareness of new and upcoming achievements. To state the obvious, Siegfried is a big sing, and Simon O'Neill – whose clear attention to and projection of the text is both praiseworthy and ever-increasing – can sound pushed in heavier passages into a thinner, more 'character' tone. This doesn't spoil an overall impression of youthful ardour and freshness of approach, an important common factor throughout this cast, be it in the approaches of the experienced (and here not over-mannered) Mime of Gerhard Siegel or the exciting relative newcomers, Iain Paterson's Wanderer/Wotan and Rachel Nicholls's Brünnhilde. As in his *Rheingold* performance (7/18), Paterson's god – refreshingly strong in the high-lying passages at the start of Act 3 – is suave and assured without any trace of the cynical manipulator that had become almost a cliché copied from various stage productions. Nicholls sounds every inch the fresh and young Valkyrie, without that mock goddess grandeur that many older interpreters have brought to this part of the role. Her text is not quite as 'in' the voice yet as it will surely become but the emotions are clarion-clear.

The newness of approach, evidently relished by the conductor, is further touched on in Malin Christensson's clear but full-sounding Woodbird and the Siegfried's horn-playing of the young, BBC award-winning Ben Goldscheider, which really does sound fresh and rustic, not like knocking off a routine practised umpteen times before. Strong contributions also from, especially, Martin Winkler's Alberich (quite frightening in his confrontation with Wotan), Clive Bayley's Fafner (with a voice trumpet that sounds more acoustic than electric) and Anna Larsson's familiar Erda. As before in the



Special sheen: Mark Elder guides the Hallé Orchestra through Wagner's *Siegfried*, completing their classy concert recordings of *The Ring*

cycle, the recording presents thoroughly convincing balances for the work.

An outstanding achievement, then, and one which should be placed very high in the 'form order' of competing versions – especially of newer *Siegfrieds* – it's now almost impossible to draw up. The performance's concentration makes for compelling and important listening. There's a link to download a libretto and English translation. **Mike Ashman**

Johan Botha

'Italian Opera Arias'

Giordano Andrea Chénier – Come un bel dì di maggio; Un dì all'azzurro spazio; Ecco l'altare; Vicino a te s'acqueta **Leoncavallo** Pagliacci – Nome di Dio! Quelle stesse parole!; Recitar! Mentre preso dal delirio **Mascagni** Cavalleria rusticana – Mamma, quel vino è generoso; Tu qui, Santuzza! **Puccini** Tosca – E lucevan le stelle; Recondita armonia. **Turandot** – Nessun dorma; Non piangere Liù **Verdi** Aida – Celeste Aida. Don Carlo – È lui! Desso l'Infante!; Io l'ho perduta. **Otello** – Dio! Mi potevi scagliar; Esultate!; Già nella notte densa; Niun mi tema. I vespri siciliani – È di Monforte il cenno; Qual è il tuo nome?; Sogno, o son desto?

Johan Botha *ten* Vienna State Opera

Orfeo ® ② C967 192 (140' • DDD)

Recorded live 1998-2007



This double album serves as a natural follow-up to a selection of scenes by Beethoven, Strauss and Wagner, recorded live at the Vienna State Opera, brought out by Orfeo a couple of years ago (7/17). There a booklet essay explaining how Johan Botha's security and elegance in the most demanding repertoire was built on his command of the Italian repertoire, and that's what we get here in a further selection of live recordings from the Haus am Ring.

The late South African tenor is never less than impressive, negotiating even the most taxing vocal lines smoothly and stylishly. The voice is focused and well supported throughout its range: this is a singer whose well-schooled technique can be heard in every phrase. He sails through the *Vespri siciliani* extracts, his 'Nessun dorma' is unusually elegant and Chénier's lines are spun out in long legatos. We have a delicate, sensitive account of 'Celeste Aida', replete with a proper *decrescendo* on that final B flat, and some unusually tender contributions to *Otello*'s 'Già nella notte

densa', where he is joined by Krassimira Stoyanova's classy Desdemona.

But while Botha's remarkable reliability was such a virtue in the tiring lines of Wagner and Strauss and the solidity of his technique here shouldn't be underestimated, the Italian repertoire highlights what the tenor was less adept at. He does very little acting with a smoothly regulated timbre that doesn't offer much Italianate colour, and he occasionally hovers a whisker beneath the note. Characterisation was not his forte and there's little sense of the passions that burn furnace-like at the heart of these red-blooded creations.

You get a hint, perhaps, in *Otello*'s 'Dio! Mi potevi scagliar', and Botha adds a few little sobs into 'Niun mi tema' – and to Canio's 'Vesti la giubba' too – but I miss those characters' elemental drive. With Violeta Urmana's serene Maddalena at his side, meanwhile, Chénier's 'Vicino a te' is certainly impressively sung but never erupts quite as it might, even if the audience does so enthusiastically at the close. Indeed, the audience reactions throughout are testament to Botha's effectiveness in the theatre, but it's not something that's always ideally captured by the microphones here. **Hugo Shirley**

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Guardians of the Heart Machine

Whirlwind Recordings © WR4375



Having played with practically everybody who is anybody on the highly competitive New York jazz scene over the last quarter century and appeared on almost 80 albums, Seamus Blake can officially put in for his 'been there, done that' t-shirt. He's now relocated to Europe, and after a successful tour with three top young French musicians, *Guardians of the Heart Machine* is a musical photograph in time of the state of the art of this highly-rated tenor saxophonist. The verdict is that he's in a good place – the core of his style is a strong melodic sense that guides the internal logic of his well crafted improvisations on pieces like 'I'm OK', 'Sneaky D', 'Betty in Rio' and

'Blues for the Real Human Beings' – the latter also showing off pianist Tony Tixier. He also finds time to work in the edgy 'Lanota', while the title-track sees the saxophonist zipping through a series of interesting changes. An accomplished, strikingly original voice, Blake deserves to be heard. **Stuart Nicholson**

Herlin Riley

Perpetual Optimism

Mack Avenue Records © Mack 1136



If you want to stay angry, don't listen to this record. Raging storms have been known to dissipate and transform themselves into breezy sunshine after spending three minutes in the company of Herlin Riley. He could hardly have found a more fitting title for his latest outing as leader, *Perpetual*

Optimism, such is the easygoing charm that characterises the playing of the New Orleans drummer and longtime member of Wynton Marsalis's Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. Which is not to say that it's in any way facile: this kind of sleek, rhythmically driven elegance is hard-won and can only be achieved by means of great discipline and deep musical wisdom. The set is split 50/50 between originals and covers. Willie Dixon's 'Wang Dang Doodle', sung by Riley, is a lot of fun and a good example of the latter; 'Be There When I Get There', which gives interlocking parts to saxophonist Goodwin Louis and trumpeter Bruce Harris, is a delightful example of the former. 'I always look forward, no matter what happens in life,' proclaims Riley. 'Commit yourself to PERPETUAL OPTIMISM!' With Herlin's help, I'm going to give it a shot.

Robert Shore

World Music

Brought to you by **SONGLINES**

Cormac Byrne & Adam Summerhayes

Stone Soup

Nimbus Records © N16373



This is an audacious piece of work by two accomplished musicians. Adam Summerhayes is a classically trained fiddler with a rich Northumbrian, Celtic and Eastern European heritage. Having travelled the world playing concertos, he has been drawn back to his folk roots. He asked Irish bodhrán percussionist Cormac Byrne to join his latest project, the Gypsy-Celtic-klezmer fusion of Dodo Street Band, and this is an organic offshoot from that meeting. In a Derbyshire kitchen late one night, they conceived the idea to record an improvised album over the space of two

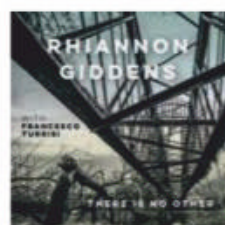
nights. With its emphasis on the passage of a night and its pace and rhythm, it evokes both contemporary and Indian classical music.

Byrne brought a marimbula and berimbau into the studio to add extra texture to this sonic 'stone soup.' The first tones of fiddle feel Eastern, like a slow alap, before the rhythm builds, pulling the sound west towards something akin to klezmer. The whole is very satisfying. **Nathaniel Handy**

Rhiannon Giddens with Francesco Turrisi

There is No Other

Nonesuch © 591336-2



There's no stopping the ex-Carolina Chocolate Drops singer right now. The ballet she scored with Italian multi-

instrumentalist Francesco Turrisi premiered earlier this year and now the pair have collaborated on this delightful collection, which traces the influence of Islamic culture on European and African-American music.

Like many of Giddens' projects, the album's title is layered with sociopolitical meaning – the 'Other' referring to cultural marginalisation as their panoply of instruments tease out hidden and unexpected sonic connections on material that ranges from original Giddens compositions to a diverse set of interpretations that includes Ola Belle Reed's 'Gonna Write Me a Letter', Oscar Brown Jr's 'Brown Baby', the traditional Italian folk dance tune 'Pizzica di San Vito' and a memorably intense take on 'Black Swan' from Gian Carlo Menotti's opera *The Medium*, once recorded by Nina Simone. The results are acoustic perfection.

Nigel Williamson

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REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

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Bruckner and Mahler from Haitink

Richard Osborne revisits two major symphony cycles from the great Dutch conductor

The complete Bruckner and Mahler cycles which Bernard Haitink recorded with the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra between 1962 and 1971 have long been notable examples of what, at best, the gramophone can offer the dedicated collector. As early as 1972, these complete cycles had the air of acquisitions that would look well on our shelves in decades to come.

The recordings first appeared in digitised form on the occasion of Haitink's 65th birthday in 1994. The digitisation was no better than it should be, and the documentation was poor. That has all changed, thanks to Andrew Walter's painstaking remastering of the generally superb analogue originals, and to a pair of usefully informative yet nicely differentiated booklet essays by Andrew Stewart.

Stewart's Mahler essay provides us with an overview of an Amsterdam Mahler tradition which dates back to the composer's first encounter with Willem Mengelberg's Concertgebouw Orchestra in 1903. The Bruckner essay, by contrast, is concerned more with the music itself and Haitink's approach to it. This is sensible, given that the Concertgebouw's Bruckner inheritance has always been more diverse, yet less deep-rooted, than its Mahler one.

Writing in these columns in the late 1960s, Deryck Cooke (another great Bruckner-Mahler man) detailed Haitink's virtues as a Brucknerian as his feeling for the 'chaste nobility' of the music; his preservation of an unswerving line with only such slight tempo modifications as are necessary to allow the music to make its effect; and the presence of 'an objective expressive intensity without any undue intrusion of his own personality'.

Haitink's predecessor as Chief Conductor of the Concertgebouw Orchestra, Eduard van Beinum, had

exhibited similar qualities; rather more so than revered Brucknerian Eugen Jochum, with whom Haitink had shared the chief conductorship in 1961-64. Perhaps Cooke went too far when he wrote that, in direct contradistinction to Haitink, Jochum looked after the emotion of a Bruckner symphony while letting the structure look after itself. Haitink's Bruckner has its own accelerations and decelerations, though (and this is the point) never

Ever since, as a child, Haitink sat crouched over his radio listening to music, Bruckner has been a soulmate

disproportionately so. You hear this in his 1971 account of the epic Fifth Symphony, a performance whose dramatically presented integration of Bruckner's vast armoury of thematic material remains, even now, unsurpassed.

Where Cooke occasionally parted company with Haitink concerned what he took to be brisk speeds in some of the opening movements. This worked fine in the case of the Fourth Symphony, a performance Cooke judged nonpareil at the time, less so in the case of the Sixth, Seventh and Eighth symphonies. I rather enjoy Haitink's bracing account of the Seventh but the performance of the Eighth is, indeed, something else.

Since the 1970s, Haitink has generally spent in the region of 85 minutes over the Eighth. In this 1969 Amsterdam performance, he dispatches it in 74. I've heard quicker: Otto Klemperer in manic mood live in Cologne. But Haitink's isn't a manic performance, simply an unusually high-octane one, the Scherzo flashing by like a comet in the night sky.

Unsatisfactory though the performance is in many ways, there was clearly fire on the roof at the time of its making.

It's inevitable, perhaps, that Dutch Protestant Bruckner speaks in brisker tones than Bruckner from the Catholic south. If there is, at times, a missing dimension here, it's a certain lack of the numinous. Unlike Haitink's beloved Bruno Walter, the Catholic Jochum or Herbert von Karajan in his own unknowable way, Haitink wasn't a believer, which makes a difference if it's the numinous you seek.

When, however, the God-fearing Bruckner appears to be standing on the very brink of unbelief, as in the unfinished Ninth Symphony, Haitink has few equals. In this 1965 recording, he plays the symphony as a troubled psychodrama: what theologians of the time would have termed a 'vastation'. Not that the work is in any way pulled about. As always, it's Haitink's purposefully thought-through direction that is key, not least in the strangely dysfunctional Scherzo and Trio where Haitink has better tempo-relations than a clearly somewhat bemused Bruno Walter.

Haitink began the Bruckner cycle in 1963 with Symphony No 3, one of the first recordings not to use the shortened and reorchestrated 1889 rewrite, and ended with a triumphant account of the First Symphony in its original Linz edition. A nice detail is his inclusion of Symphony No 0, as Bruckner numbered it. Bruckner may have disowned the piece but since he'd worked on it both before and after the completion of the First Symphony, it merits a place in the canon.

Ever since, as a child, Haitink sat crouched over his radio listening to music, Bruckner has been a soulmate. Mahler, by contrast, made him apprehensive when young and later became a subject of passing despair. 'We all know there's much better music,' he told Michael Oliver in 1994, 'but



Bernard Haitink and the Concertgebouw Orchestra in 1969

if you want success as a conductor you do Mahler, and the louder the better.'

Yet, in some respects, the Mahler cycle is the more important, and the more consistently successful, of the two. Here we see writ large Haitink's exemplary musicianship and independence of mind. Amsterdam's Mahler-Mengelberg legacy was important, but one needed to be wary of the 'changements' (Mengelberg's word) which Mengelberg made to Mahler's scores. When Eduard van Beinum took charge of the orchestra after the German occupation, he began restoring the balance between tradition and text. Haitink similarly avoided the trap of allowing precedent to impede his own thought-through view of the music. (An exception would be the first movement of the Fifth Symphony where he follows closely the tempo relations set down by Mahler in his 1905 Welte piano-roll.)

Where Simon Rattle based his first recording of the *Resurrection* Symphony on Oskar Fried's 1924 recording, Haitink made no such act of obeisance to Fried, Walter, Klemperer or anyone else. At first, this appears to be an oddly classical-sounding reading; yet, make no mistake, momentous things are afoot. It's the same with the tragic Sixth Symphony, where Haitink's purposeful classicism offers us

a trenchant overview of the music without resort to the kind of inspired interventions a Barbirolli or a Bernstein would give us.

And how good the orchestra is! This is itself of historical interest, since what we have in these two sets is the old Concertgebouw Orchestra – quintessentially Dutch but with Gallic overtones – in all its idiosyncratic pre-1980s majesty.

When the performances were gathered together in 1972, Edward Greenfield wrote of their 'unmannered concentration', exemplified by an account of the Fifth Symphony's famous *Adagietto* that was neither as swift as Mengelberg's or Walter's nor as slow as many latter-day performances. It's interesting, too, that after hearing Haitink's revelatory performance of the Ninth Symphony, Greenfield revisited Haitink's performance of the finale of the thrillingly presented Third Symphony, hearing the music afresh as the work of a composer whose acquaintance with Beethoven's late quartets was by no means incidental.

The performance of the Seventh Symphony, a rarity at the time, the Bernstein performances and early recording notwithstanding, has rightly won golden opinions. But this account of the Ninth Symphony has also stood the test of time. In a famously adulatory first

review Deryck Cooke wrote, 'I was quite flabbergasted by this great Mahler record, which in spite of the illustrious competition listed above [Walter, Klemperer, Solti, Horenstein], I can hail as the ideal Ninth, beyond any criticism'. It was, and remains, a very great performance of a symphony which, latterly, has become something of a party piece for the great and the good of the conducting profession.


What hasn't stood the test of time is the recording and performance of the Eighth Symphony. Nor do the three discs devoted to Mahler's vocal works add greatly to the set's value. The 1973 recording of the revised final version of *Das klagende Lied* is rightly admired; and there is Janet Baker in *Das Lied von der Erde*. But to get Baker you have to tolerate James King. Elsewhere neither Hermann Prey nor Jessye Norman make any real inroads into Mahler's word-setting, though, happily, the words are there in Decca's scrupulously edited booklet.

As to the recordings, these were always remarkable, thanks to Philips's state-of-the-art technology and producer Jaap van Ginneken's refined and civilised use of it. Emptied of its seats, the Concertgebouw hall provides the kind of acoustic space both these composers need, as well as a space in which a good producer can etch the composer's orchestrations with a Dürer-like precision. There are occasional moments of dryness in the sound of the upper strings but for the most part the recordings continue to be of what we used to call 'demonstration' quality. (As well as individual CDs, both cycles are also available on single Blu-ray discs, included in the boxes.)


Unusually, van Ginneken, who died shortly after the series' completion at the early age of 58, both monitored the performances musically and ran the desk. What's more, his studio monitors were no more than state-of-the-art domestic equipment – Quad amplifiers, Quad Electrostatic speakers – played at safe domestic levels. As with the music-making, there was nothing flashy here, no hint of effect for effect's sake. Such work lasts, as these beautifully produced 90th-birthday boxes reassuringly prove. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

Bruckner Symphonies Nos 1-9. Te Deum
Soloists; Concertgebouw Orchestra /
Bernard Haitink

Decca © 10 +  483 4660

Mahler Symphonies and song-cycles
Soloists; Concertgebouw Orchestra /
Bernard Haitink

Decca © 12 +  483 4643

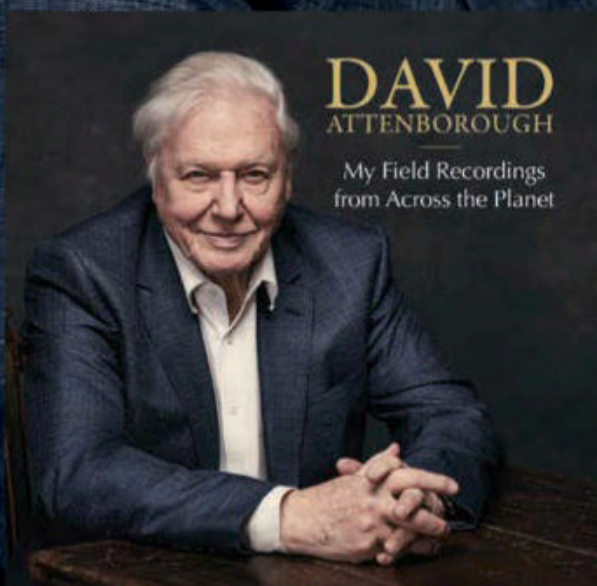
*“While I was theoretically looking for pythons,
in the evenings I would record different types of music...”*

David Attenborough reflects on his time filming *Zoo Quest* between 1954-1963

DAVID ATTENBOROUGH

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THE WORLD MUSIC COLLECTOR

BOX-SET *Round-up*

Rob Cowan offers a personal round-up of some worthwhile CD bargains

If you want the briefest of sampling points to reveal the virtues of Jaap van Zweden's Hong Kong Philharmonic **Ring** cycle try track 7 on the first disc, the point in the first scene of *Das Rheingold* where Alberich (Peter Sidhom) climbs the rock where the gold is resting, angrily curses love, makes off with it and leaves the Rhinemaidens distressed; or maybe Fafner and Fasolt's Jurassic-style stamping on track 12. With excellent sound, singing that is often way above average and a production team that appreciates the stormier elements of Wagner's humbling rhetoric (try the Act 3 Prelude to *Siegfried* with its vivid peals of thunder), we have a *Ring* that shoots straight from the hip. The vocal star, at least for me, is the charismatic and darkly imposing presence of Matthias Goerne, whose assumption of Wotan, whether so-named in *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*, or as the noble, riddle-posing Wanderer in *Siegfried*, is vocally magnificent, his projection effortless, always rich in tone, texturally smooth yet vividly suggestive of the character, his 'Farewell' near the close of *Die Walküre* especially moving. We're offered three well-matched Brünnhildes, Petra Lang in *Die Walküre*, Heidi Melton in *Siegfried* and, possibly most impressive of all, Gun-Brit Barkmin in *Götterdämmerung*. Also of note are Michelle DeYoung's Fricka, and the Siegmund-Sieglinde partnership of Stuart Skelton and Heidi Melton (*Die Walküre*). And yet this *Ring*'s star act has to be the conductor Jaap van Zweden who keeps a tight rein on a score that, great though it is, can in lesser hands lose dramatic focus. Here that virtually never happens; the music has the impact of a fresh-minted epic soundtrack. As first-stop *Rings* go, this has to be among the very best, especially given the modest price point.

Then again if you're averse to voices maybe you fancy the idea of a '*Ring* without words', key orchestral highlights played out as a cinematic running sequence. Telarc provides just that in the context of its three-CD **Classic Richard Wagner** set. As with other collections in the series there are no notes though if you play the CD through your PC the tracking info is on screen. Things aren't quite as they seem;



for example, the promised 'Entry of the gods into Valhalla' falls short of the mighty processional and morphs from Donner's summoned thunderstorm into the stormy beginning of *Die Walküre*. Thrilling passages rarely heard outside of an operatic context proliferate, though I wish Lorin Maazel and the Berlin Philharmonic had included what's possibly the most exciting orchestral segment in the whole *Ring*, namely the Prelude to the Third Act of *Siegfried*. Playing and sound quality are magnificent and I'd especially recommend this CD to youngsters with musically active imaginations. Also included is a well-

The best way to sum up Haitink as represented here? The effect of arriving home, where everything is as it should be

sung, finely chiselled *Die Walküre* Act 1 (Susan Dunn, Klaus König, Peter Meven, Pittsburgh Symphony and Maazel) and 'Wagner for Orchestra' with the Cincinnati Symphony under Jesús López-Cobos, though don't be put off by the soporific opening of the *Meistersinger* Overture. The *Faust* Overture in particular is excellent.

Excellence and more marks BR Klassik's **Bernard Haitink: Portrait** (featuring the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and Chorus) as exceptional. Bruckner's Fifth and Sixth Symphonies are among the jewels in the conductor's discographical crown, the orchestra's blend of warm-textured strings and biting brass hitting the spot consistently, while Haitink attends to the music's structure with unflinching control. Mahler comes off equally well, the Third rich in narrative incident (the first movement especially), the Fourth

full of fantasy (the slow movement is particularly beautiful), the Ninth visited by a level of nervous agitation that is rare in Haitink's more recent performances, specifically in the first movement. Also included, a judiciously paced and frequently uplifting account of Beethoven's *Missa solemnis* and equally satisfying versions of the great Haydn oratorios *The Seasons* and *The Creation*. And the best way to sum up Haitink as represented here? The effect of arriving home, where everything is as it should be – the music, its playing and its interpretation, all captured in excellent sound quality.

To end, a return to **Mahler** for an integral set of the symphonies where the majority of performances are given by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra under Yoel Levi, with the Cincinnati Symphony under Jesús López-Cobos offering Nos 3 and 9 and Robert Shaw, in Atlanta, performing the Eighth. The standard is consistently good throughout, at its best in the broadly paced finale of the Seventh, which 'adds up' in a way that is rare on disc, and the finale of the Sixth where the hammer blows have considerable impact. With excellent engineering and consistently good playing, Telarc provides a series of clear-headed, largely unaffected performances that while rarely scaling the heights in terms of interpretative vision capture the sound of Mahler with impressive dynamism. Even seasoned cognoscenti will stand to learn something from listening to them. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

Wagner Der Ring des Nibelungen
van Zweden Naxos © 14 8 501403

Classic Richard Wagner Maazel, López-Cobos Telarc © 3 CRO1524

Bernard Haitink: Portrait
BR Klassik © 11 900174

Mahler Levi, López-Cobos, Shaw
Telarc © 13 CRO1527

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



Variety at the keyboard

When Roger Fiske reviewed **Eduardo del Pueyo's** first recording of Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata in these pages back in November 1959 he commented that, in the first movement, 'He keeps tearing off in a tremendous hurry and then standing still to get his breath back.' In the context of 'The Complete Philips Recordings' you can sample that brief episode for yourself by accessing disc 3 track 7 from 0'34". Fiske also praised Pueyo for making 'an intelligent shot at playing the slow movement at 92 quavers a minute (Beethoven's metronome mark)', comparing him with Solomon at 60 quavers per minute, which means an astonishing difference in movement timing between 14'53" and 22'20". The interesting point here is that when Pueyo came to re-record the work as part of his complete Beethoven sonata cycle in 1976-77 (Pavane ADW7073), his timing for the movement had stretched to 20'06", while the 'hurrying' element in the first movement had virtually vanished. Both performances work, though the earlier version has the greater degree of character.

Also included as part of this Pueyo collection are equally arresting (if occasionally quirky) accounts of Sonatas Nos 8, 14, 18, 21, 23 and 26, a darkly contemplative reading of Franck's *Prélude, choral et fugue* and Bach's *Italian Concerto* (with a rather humdrum *Andante*) and First Partita (again, the Sarabande sounds rather literal). Add a colourfully idiomatic two-disc selection of works by Granados (*Danzas españolas* and *Goyescas*) and Falla (*Noches en los jardines de España*, under Jean Martinon), previously available as part of Philips's 'The Early Years' series, and you have the basis of an interpretatively stimulating collection.

Heard next to Pueyo's occasional proneness to point-making, **Wilhelm Backhaus** is the very personification of good musical judgement, especially in Beethoven, whose piano sonatas he recorded twice complete (for Decca), barring the *Hammerklavier*, of which there is the one

version only, from the first cycle. Happily, however, this sonata is also available in live recordings, one of which, from Ludwigsburg in 1953, has appeared as part of a set on SWR. From the same concert we also have Sonatas Nos 3 and 21. The grandeur of the *Hammerklavier's* opening immediately inspires confidence: where the younger Pueyo rushes his fences, Backhaus eases the line with the greatest subtlety. This is big playing, impulsive at times but never contrived. The *Eroica*-like Trio to the Scherzo is warmly sonorous until things hot up and Backhaus suddenly fires on all cylinders. The *Adagio sostenuto* is generously expressed, aided by the occasional spread chord; the faltering gait of the waltz-like second subject sounds improvised. Also included is an *Emperor* Concerto under Joseph Keilberth from 1962 which features one of the loveliest accounts of the central *Adagio un poco mosso* that I have ever heard; and a typically rugged Brahms Second Concerto with Hans Müller-Kray conducting is conceptually similar to justly celebrated studio versions that the pianist made under Carl Schuricht and Karl Böhm.

Clara Haskil's Beethoven is in a different league again – less interventionist than Pueyo's, less gruff than Backhaus's – though another Ludwigsburg concert from 1953 finds her fluffing the second of the three opening gestures that serve as a dramatic call to arms at the start of the last sonata of all, Op 111. Still, once she's into her stride the imperfections are minor, the manner of projection masterly, with telling *Luftpausen* (in the elegantly tripping transition to the development section) and thoughtful pacing as the movement steps down to its quiet coda. Some of the second movement is fairly swift, flowing too, with snow-like filigree that's captivating. The rest of the programme subscribes to the familiar Haskil template of pianistic sculpture, poised and paced to perfection. It includes (among other works) two Debussy *Études* (Nos 7 and 10) that recall the refinement of Michelangeli, a coolly persuasive reading of Ravel's *Sonatine*, two Schumann perennials (at least in Haskil's

book) – *Bunte Blätter* and the *Abegg* Variations – and a couple of encores. It's a class act, no doubt about it, and don't let me overstate the shortcomings of this live Beethoven Op 111: there's still plenty about the performance that's worth savouring.

Perhaps the most individualistic piano recital to come my way in recent months dates from May 1960 (in Ettlingen) and features **Samson François**, who's elegantly communicative in a couple of Mendelssohn *Songs without Words* and Chopin's ambling Nocturne Op 55 No 1, save for the more anguished central section. Chopin's B flat minor Sonata is something else again, ablaze for the duration, with an augmented bass line for the return of the outer section of the 'Marche funèbre'. It's very impressive. A trio of Debussy *Préludes* (including an imposing 'La cathédrale engloutie') precedes a blistering account of Prokofiev's Seventh Sonata, uncompromisingly aggressive, rhythmically very free and with a 3'03" closing *Precipitato* that sounds as if it's dodging shrapnel at every turn – a maverick alternative to various 'saner' options, including those by Pollini, Richter and Horowitz!

THE RECORDINGS



'Eduardo del Pueyo: The Complete Philips Recordings'
– Bach, Beethoven, Falla et al

Eduardo del Pueyo *pf*
Decca © ⑤ ELQ484 0193



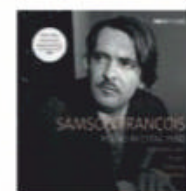
Wilhelm Backhaus: 
Beethoven, Brahms

Wilhelm Backhaus *pf*
SWR Classic ④ ③ SWR19057CD



'Clara Haskil: Recital 1953' –
Bach, Beethoven, Debussy et al

Clara Haskil *pf*
SWR Classic ④ SWR19052CD



'Samson François:
Piano Recital 1960' – Chopin,
Debussy, Mendelssohn et al

Samson François *pf*
SWR Classic ④ SWR19060CD



Unostentatiously romantic playing: violinist Ricardo Odnoposoff celebrated by the Documents label

Unsung master of the bow

Among the less celebrated but eminently worthy representatives of 'older school' violin-playing is Ricardo Odnoposoff, a former concertmaster of the Vienna State Opera and Vienna Philharmonic orchestras. The Nazi race laws put an end to his pre-war Austrian career, but not before he made a distinguished and still much-respected recording of Beethoven's Triple Concerto with the Vienna Philharmonic and soloists Stefan Auber (cello) and Angelica Morales (piano), which is happily included in this Documents collection, though the sound is rather dim (Naxos's transfer is far superior). Better served are post-war recordings of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto and Paganini's First, the latter brilliant albeit with some cut *tutti*, the former with a plaintive air about it that brings out the music's elegiac side. Odnoposoff joins the pianist Otto Herz (a distinguished duo partner with countless great instrumentalists and singers) for an urgent reading of Beethoven's Fourth and Eighth Violin Sonatas. There's also the shorter (four-movement) version of Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole*, the Debussy Sonata, concertos by Bruch (First), Prokofiev (First), Brahms and Tchaikovsky, music from the Baroque era (including Bach's Violin Concerto No 2 and solo Chaconne) and various 'virtuoso' shorter works. Walter Goehr is among the conductors represented. As to Odnoposoff's playing style, I'd call it unostentatiously romantic: try Geminiani's solo Sonata in B flat for a good sampling of various slides, shifts, dynamics, manners of vibrato and so forth. It's lovely playing.

THE RECORDING



'Ricardo Odnoposoff: Milestones of a Violin Legend'
Ricardo Odnoposoff *vn*
Documents © 10 600476

Incomparable artistry: Fritz Kreisler plays concertos and sonatas

The principal virtue of this Fritz Kreisler set from Documents is that it passes on the option of featuring the violinist's many recordings of charming morceaux and concentrates instead on major works, with two versions each of the Beethoven and Brahms concertos (under Leo Blech in the 1920s and John Barbirolli in the '30s) and of Mozart's Fourth (an acoustic version under Landon Ronald in 1924 and a 1939 remake under Sir Malcolm Sargent), the acoustic Bruch Concerto No 1, Kreisler's own String Quartet and odd movements from works that were never recorded complete. It's a shame that both versions of the Mendelssohn Concerto aren't part of the mix (though the featured recording under Blech is the better of the two); neither is Kreisler's rewrite of the first movement from Paganini's First Concerto under Eugene Ormandy. Generally speaking, the earlier recordings (which include an abridged Bach Double Concerto with Efrem Zimbalist) report a firmer tone and more purposeful attack, whereas the 1930s recordings are more subtly expressive. Also featured are the sonata

recordings with Rachmaninov (including a performance of Beethoven's Violin Sonata Op 30 No 3 made up of alternate takes), the full run of Beethoven sonatas with Franz Rupp (1935-36) and, most glorious of all, the opening movement of Bach's First Solo Sonata in G minor, with perfect chording and immaculate, typically fast trills. This is wonderful playing – vibrant, intelligent and always civilised; there isn't a violinist anywhere on earth who can begin to approach this sort of standard. The transfers seem to have been taken from reliable sources.

THE RECORDING



'Fritz Kreisler: Milestones of a Violin Legend'
Fritz Kreisler *vn*
Documents © 10 600498

Příhoda on fine form

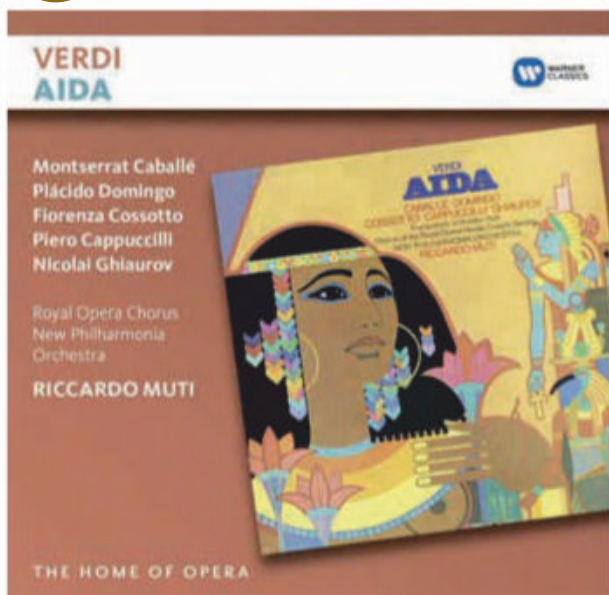
It would be difficult to imagine a style of violin-playing that marks a greater contrast with Kreisler than that of the Czech master Váša Příhoda, whose mercurial, variegated, rhapsodising performances – featuring a luscious tone, a distinctive (very gypsy-like) brand of portamento and a wide range of vibrato – lift the music off the page. DG has already reissued his wartime recording of Dvořák's Sonatina with the pianist Michael Raucheisen (in their '111: The Violin' box); and his wartime recording of the Dvořák Violin Concerto is available on Symposium (SYMPCD1266). The Sonatina issued here with Maria Bergmann (1951) is less emphatically accented than its predecessor, but equally distinctive. The Concerto (1956, under Müller-Kray) has an air of resignation about it that bespeaks a sparkling career beset by tragedy, which was certainly the case; Příhoda's intonation is more sure on the earlier recording, though the sound is a mite dusty. Best on the new disc is a lithe, energetic and sprightly account of Mozart's Third Concerto (1953, again under Müller-Kray), elegantly phrased and with a notably sweet tone. I'm presuming the athletic cadenzas are Příhoda's own (we're not told). Years ago the Podium label issued various Příhoda radio recordings in reasonable transfers but SWR's transfers, remastered from original SWR tapes, are better still.

THE RECORDING



'Váša Příhoda plays Mozart and Dvořák'
Váša Příhoda *vn*
SWR Classic © SWR19072CD

Classics RECONSIDERED



Hugo Shirley and Neil Fisher dust off their copies of Riccardo Muti's 1974 *Aida* and reconsider its 'classic' status



Verdi

Aida

Caballé *sop* **Domingo** *ten* et al **ROH Chor, Trumpeters of the Royal Military School of Music, New Philharmonia Orch / Riccardo Muti** Warner Classics

Muti is for me the undoubted hero here. Verdi would have liked his concentration on essentials and the way he suggests a real theatrical experience. So compelling is the interpretation that I played through the opera in the first place at one session. There are no weaknesses in the cast. Caballé begins with some uncertainty, but once at 'I sacri numi', she comes into her own, phrasing the cantabile of 'Numi, pietà' unforgettably with long-breathed, carefully weighted tone and without a hint of self-indulgence. Her solo in the Nile Scene is still better, and she rises to a *dolce*, *pp* top C that puts even Leontyne Price

in the shade. There is plenty of involvement in her interpretation, a constant realisation of Aida's predicament, torn between love for her soldier and for her country, a touch of seductiveness, too. The final duet crowns her performance. She is partnered splendidly by Domingo, surpassing in most respects his performance for Leinsdorf. I would still like him to make the *morendo* on the final B flat of 'Celeste Aida', and the same note in the 'Là, tra foreste vergini' section of the Nile duet, sung *dolce* for RCA, is here unfortunately *forte*: but these are insignificant details in a reading that by and large is generous in tone, virile and vibrant in execution, catching the heroic, the romantic, and tragic elements in Radames's role. Cossotto's Amneris is big-scale, totally committed and unabashedly histrionic, bringing the, by turns, amorous, jealous, vindictive and remorseful

princess to life. Cappuccilli surprised me by his vivid declamation, attention to the notes and intonation, and his authority; not a soldier to grapple with on a dark night in the desert. The Covent Garden Chorus makes a properly operatic sound, drawing on its long experience in this work. Without that advantage, the New Philharmonia surpass themselves: the woodwind playing is particularly beautiful. The Kneller Hall trumpeters contribute magnificently to the Triumphal scene, where Muti's conducting is so excellent. He rescues the ballet music from years of routine, brings out the individual characters in the big ensemble, and draws together the whole scene with an extraordinary panache that never falls over into mere showmanship. Producer John Mordler and his team support him with a vivid yet spacious recording throughout. **Alan Blyth** (2/75; abridged)

Hugo Shirley I'm reluctant to say how long it had been since I'd listened to this *Aida*. That's sometimes the problem with 'classics' – they risk gathering dust as part of the furniture of a collection. Like Alan Blyth in his original review, though, I listened through to this again in one sitting. Dusty it certainly ain't!

Neil Fisher Absolutely no dust here, except the stuff blowing past the pyramids while, six feet under, Radames and Aida are snuffing it. Writing notes as I listened to the recording, I actually scribbled down 'This production COOKS!' Age hasn't cooled the enthusiasm of the soloists, nor the strikingly individual approach taken by conductor Riccardo Muti. He's definitely got something to prove, hasn't he?

HS Yep! I'm struck by that youthful picture of him accompanying that original review,

and this recording is suffused with a missionary zeal, a desire not only to blow away the cobwebs (as well as the dust) of a century's performance of the work, but also to refresh and refocus the drama. He manages to bring to the score both a kind of intellectual rigorousness (it's not for nothing that Julian Budden compares *Aida* to *Così fan tutte*) and a proper sense of fire. There's plenty of intimacy, as well as the necessary sense of sword-and-sandals epic. But these sandals are new out of the box, the swords particularly pointy. And it's all seriously well played.

NF I chuckled a little when Blyth referred to 'years of routine' having affected performances of *Aida*, somehow thinking that this was only a problem nowadays, when so many opera houses have to put on any old *Aida* just to get the crowds in. Blyth was specifically talking about the

ballet music, and Muti's sinuous approach here calls to mind what the conductor supposedly asked of the Philharmonia when he first conducted it: 'Less meat, more fish.' Still, for dramatic intelligence, idiomatic playing and especially spatial depth, I'd go for a modern set: Antonio Pappano's on Warner Classics. Just occasionally Muti doesn't let the music breathe as it should. And he has such fine soloists that they deserve wiggle room.

HS Yes, it's a sign of his discipline, perhaps, that he's never tempted to wallow in what his cast can do – I admire that, but I'm not sure if I like it all the time! Anyway, we certainly shouldn't take this cast for granted. You couldn't say that there's a weak link there. But Caballé occasionally feels a little subservient to me away from the big numbers, and, although this is superb singing, can she be a little over-luxurious?



From left: producer John Mordler with Cossotto, Domingo and Caballé at Walthamstow Town Hall, east London

NF If only that were a problem we had with most exponents of the role! I know what you're suggesting – Caballé's voice is so delicious that it's like a tray of the richest truffles, and this opera is the full meat 'n' potatoes experience. But I adore listening to her glide through the music so elegantly, no more so than in her superbly sustained, silvery voiced 'O patria mia'. And where *you* hear subservience, I hear something more intelligent. This is an Aida who knows what little power she has – what little means to seduce Radames away from Amneris and military glory. I think she's playing a little submissive to keep him interested. And, let's face it, with Fiorenza Cossotto as her love rival, she's got her work cut out ...

HS That's a really good point about Caballé, and one actually feels that the odds are stacked more against this Amneris than other ones. Cossotto is fabulous, with such strength and grandeur, but this performance – which I guess one could describe as meat 'n' potatoes, in the best sense – nevertheless feels as though it's no match for Caballé's more sphinxy seductiveness.

NF What Cossotto really manages to get across is her character's dignity as well as her humanity. Yes, she has that marvellous cutting edge to the voice, but also spins out some lovely lines at the top of her range. The Judgement scene is a minute-by-minute drama, not at all treated as some

grand scena. Before that, however, I was drawn, unusually, to the very brief scene between Amneris and the (extremely imposing) Ramfis of Nicolai Ghiaurov at the beginning of Act 3, where the princess says she will pray that Radames will be hers. It's a real moment of tenderness and gives us fresh insight into the character.

HS And what about Domingo, in this his second studio Radames of four – is he worth fighting over?

NF Oof. Stuck between Caballé and Cossotto, Plácido's in a pickle, isn't he? The tenor is in strong form, with good levels of swagger and ardour, best of all in the final duet with Caballé. My major quibble, and I'm more bothered by this than Blyth, is his earthbound 'Celeste Aida', which should be dreamy, ethereal. I know it's not easy, but I wonder whether Muti minded that Domingo hit that notorious B flat at *fortissimo*, not going near the *morendo pp*. Does it grate with you?

HS I don't mind so much about the non-existent *pianissimo*, per se, and at least that final B flat is more cleanly struck than that on 'EEEEER-gerti' 20 seconds earlier. Such past stylists as Bergonzi and, especially, Björling hardly bothered with what Verdi wrote on that concluding B flat, either, and I get a bit impatient with quite how dreamy and ethereal Jonas Kaufmann ends up in the Pappano set. But you're right that the overall effect in Domingo's

account is earthbound, even if there's no denying the sheer youthful health of the voice at this early (pre-Otello) stage in his career. And the other roles? You've already mentioned Ghiaurov, but what about Piero Cappuccilli – he's certainly forceful in his declamation, but isn't he a tad unvaried of tone?

NF *Anatema su voi!* The poor old Ethiopian gets criminally undercast so often, and while I'm not necessarily convinced that Cappuccilli could head an army to biff the pharaoh, it's just such a beautiful, rounded, and *classy* voice. I could listen to the Italian baritone sing anything. True, he basically just uncorks it and it all pours forth, but his confrontation with Caballé's fraught Aida is a feast of wonderful singing. Needless to say, he has no problems heading up to a G flat. As for the King, he's usually a bit of a dry old stick (and sometimes he's deliberately played that way), but Luigi Roni has a tiger in the tank, too, doesn't he?

HS Oh, yes, I like Roni, and the Messenger of the young Nicola Martinucci is pretty impressive too! And OK, maybe I'm being a bit mean about *povero* Piero's Amonasro.

But let's return to the orchestral playing, which I touched on briefly earlier. I find it seriously impressive, and you can also hear how well the Covent Garden chorus has been coached ...

NF The focus and carefully sustained gravity of the singing in the 'anointing of Radames' shenanigans in Act 1 (a scene that rarely grips) is impressive, as well as the range of soft dynamics that the chorus finds – I sense Muti's controlling hand here, too. It's just as much of a pleasure to listen to the Philharmonia woodwind in that scene, who play with dancelike levity. At the other end of the spectrum, let's hear it for the Trumpeters of the Royal Military School of Music, who have hotfooted it from Kneller Hall in south-west London to the Nile Delta (OK, Walthamstow Town Hall, east London) but keep their composure admirably, especially considering Muti's speedy tempos in the Triumphal March. Even if elephants were not actually present for this *Aida*, their trumpeting isn't missed when we have this impressive bunch.

HS Indeed! Anyway, it's maybe time for us to pack our trunks and come to a conclusion. I'd say – and I feel I'm speaking for us both here – that Muti's *Aida* still stands up very well: bracing, brilliantly played and well sung. 🍷

Books



Arnold Whittall welcomes a valuable companion to Janáček:

'Knowing what to leave out in such surveys, and avoiding blandness, is never easy, but Simeone manages it with ease'



Geraint Lewis is full of praise for a monumental Tippett biography:

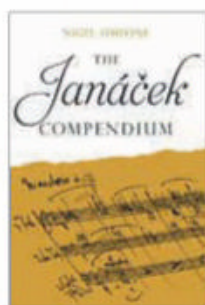
'To get inside the mind, and under the skin, of such a complex figure so completely is nothing short of miraculous'

The Janáček Compendium

By Nigel Simeone

The Boydell Press, HB, 284pp, £60

ISBN 978-1-78327-337-9



There is a serious argument to be made that Mahler (1860-1911) and Janáček (1854-1928) were the most important of all 20th-century composers. Although both lived most of their lives in the 19th century, they only became widely known after the 1950s. But their prominence in concert hall or opera house and recording studio since that time has given our musical culture great enthusiasm for a musical language that combines strongly traditional qualities with powerfully original stylistic traits. Without this development, the argument runs, new music as well as musical life in recent decades could well have been much more determinedly radical and overtly modernist than has actually been the case. So, in this sense at least, their purely posthumous influence arguably equals and even outweighs that of great composers who lived much longer into the 20th century, like Sibelius or Stravinsky.

With both Mahler and Janáček, frequent performances and recordings have brought with them extensive documentation and research activity, and in Janáček's case – reflecting the pioneering advocacy of his operas, in authentic editions, by Sir Charles Mackerras – English-language writing has been particularly rich. A high point in this field was reached relatively recently with the monumental two-volume biography by John Tyrrell, *Janáček: Years of a Life* (Faber & Faber: 2006-07); but a decade before that Tyrrell had collaborated with Nigel Simeone and Alena Němcová on *Janáček's Works: A Catalogue of the Music and Writings* (Clarendon Press: 1997), which provided the fullest range of documentary information concerning sources, editions

and other matters in 500 superbly well-edited pages. As a 'one-man show', and with just under 300 pages, Simeone's *The Janáček Compendium* may appear to be a more modest enterprise, but it might also be thought rather more ambitious; its alphabetical, dictionary-style format aims to offer a sequence of concise, up-to-date narratives in which all the composer's works and writings, along with various individuals associated with him – performers, scholars, other composers, relatives and friends – are introduced. Knowing what to leave out in such surveys, while writing in a way that keeps blandness and the perfunctory at bay, is never easy, but Simeone manages it with ease. Relevant institutions, locations and other topics are also included, in a skilfully sustained overview that, to my eyes, omits little or nothing that even the most demanding seeker for information and opinion about Janáček could expect to find.

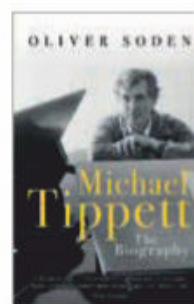
As well as the 'Dictionary', preceded by an introduction and short biography, the *Compendium* contains a complete catalogue of works with useful information about premieres and published editions, as well as a bibliography keyed to the references at the end of the individual dictionary entries. There are a decent number of illustrations, helping to bring to life the more important localities in which Janáček's works were rooted; and although there is no discography as such, the Dictionary includes a detailed account of 'Recordings before 1960' which adds useful information about CD reissues where appropriate. There are also references to more recent recordings within the entries for individual performers. It is sad to note that John Tyrrell, Janáček expert par excellence, died as the *Compendium* was being prepared for publication. Fittingly, it is dedicated to his memory. **Arnold Whittall**

Michael Tippett: The Biography

By Oliver Soden

Weidenfeld & Nicolson, HB, 768pp, £25

ISBN 978-1-474-60602-8



The first time I saw Michael Tippett in the flesh was at the dress rehearsal, in September 1976, of WNO's revelatory production of *The Midsummer Marriage*, when I sat in the row directly behind him. He was with the Earl of Harewood (then running ENO) and it was moving to see how the composer (an unfeasibly youthful 71) was often visibly affected by the impact of hearing his music allied to this brilliant new stage conception. But just at the opening of the great visionary aria for Madame Sosostriis in Act 3, the voice of Helen Watts was suddenly inaudible from behind a complex contraption of veils: the performance was halted and I feared for Tippett's reaction. He stood up abruptly, slapped his thighs vigorously, turned around and roared with laughter, winking at those of us in his view ... and at a blink, the tension vanished.

This first full biography of Tippett is a treasure trove of detailed information and yet it reads as compellingly as a thriller or psychological novel. Oliver Soden quotes Sylvia Townsend Warner as a heading: 'The essential in a biography, so I believe, is that the subject of the biography should have known himself.' In this case we will, obviously, never know the answer – but as one who did know the subject to a limited extent, I can confirm that this volume brings him to uncanny and vivid life in a way that chimes exactly with the irresistible impression he always created at any encounter. That Soden never met Tippett makes his achievement all the more astonishing – he was born in 1990, less than a decade before the composer died. At Clare College, Cambridge, he read English and in his third year wrote a detailed study of TS Eliot's plays, which led to a fascination with Tippett's theatrical world. But to get inside the mind, and under the skin, of such a complex figure so completely is nothing short of miraculous.



A passionate genius: Michael Tippett is the subject of a superb biography by Oliver Soden

The original author of this book was to have been the late Dennis Marks, a cultural polymath who was responsible for the television production of Tippett's last opera, *New Year*, in 1990. Married to the composer's devoted publisher Sally Groves, he had barely started on this great challenge when he died after a sudden illness. Soden was the inspired and perfect choice to take up the baton and to sift through a huge reservoir of material which could easily have drowned the most intrepid and determined biographer. But this is the most detailed and intimate study of any great British composer to date and it is telling to compare it with another 'official' volume, Humphrey Carpenter's intricate but ultimately unsatisfactory treatment of Tippett's close friend and colleague Benjamin Britten. Carpenter never met his subject either – and in his case it tells, damagingly. This equally complex and controversial musical genius refuses to come alive and remains a cipher throughout the book. Any page of Soden's, in contrast, brings Tippett to living, breathing life, as if he had just walked into the room.

The areas of controversy (as with Britten) are legion: homosexuality, left-wing political involvements, pacifism, sexual partners (true or false), a difficult

legacy and its mixed reception. Soden doesn't flinch at anything and some revelations are both breathtaking and heart-stopping. The 1930s are traversed with craggy insight and some have already found the full extent of Tippett's Trotskyist sympathies uncomfortable to swallow. And yet, to my mind, they are entirely of a piece with the single-mindedly youthful idealism of a man who confronted a torn world with all the clear-eyed vision of a passionate genius. Ah – that word! It first emerges here in a letter by David Ayerst in describing 'a poor musical genius of twenty-three'. No evidence of genius on paper would emerge for at least another decade – but this quality was intrinsic and unavoidable for those who could perceive it.

This explains much of the narrative that follows in Soden's journey. A genius has a path to follow which others can but bend to accommodate, as has been more publicly acknowledged in Britten's case. Tippett was prolifically articulate in this respect where Britten was painfully not – but in either case, the outcome can only be judged against the pitiless demands of the creative drive and its artistic results. A Peter Pears, as a constant in Britten's life, was never to land in Tippett's – and though he regretted

this on one level, who can tell if such a presence would, in practice, have been driven out? Soden has to chart a number of crucial relationships in Tippett's story and does so with forensic but sympathetic insight. He doesn't judge, condemn or excuse – because he already provides the parameters for understanding – but we glean an unparalleled insight into the workings of emotional and sexual dependence and independence.

Crucial and central to all, ultimately, is the music itself. Some tin-eared reviewers are happy to contest its value altogether. The present-day *Times* even sent Soden's book to its former sports correspondent (with hilariously myopic results) presumably unaware of the piquant fact that Tippett's elder brother Peter had once served in the same post. Naysayers have always played a part in the reception history of most great composers and in Tippett's case they have been more obtuse than most. Some of his still-living colleagues will emerge with shame from these very pages – but Tippett's stature has already survived the slings and arrows of lesser figures and will continue to grow irresistibly just as the general paucity of his successors becomes correspondingly more evident. **Geraint Lewis**



Brahms in Vienna in 1895, two years before he died; the 'prematurely grizzled' composer was feeling his age, having suffered several bereavements

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Brahms's Four Serious Songs

Brahms's final set of songs has attracted a range of singers to its dark sound world. **Richard Wigmore** assesses some available versions

After he had grown that famous patriarchal beard in his late forties, Brahms seems to have enjoyed appearing prematurely grizzled. Yet when he completed his *Vier ernste Gesänge* ('Four Serious Songs') on his 63rd and last birthday, May 7, 1896, he had every reason to feel his age. Over the previous few years the composer had suffered a string of bereavements, including his former pupil and close musical confidante Elisabet von Herzogenberg, née Stockhausen. His beloved Clara Schumann lay mortally ill (she died on May 20). And he himself was already suffering from the first symptoms of the liver cancer that would kill him the following April.

Brahms's friend and biographer Max Kalbeck remarked how the agnostic composer 'always liked to seek out the godless texts from the Bible'. Like the *German Requiem*, these meditations on last things are devoid of anything that might be described as conventionally religious. Indeed, Brahms pointedly described them as 'anti-dogmatic, also in part unbelieving'. The first two songs, 'Denn es gehet dem Menschen wie dem Vieh' and 'Ich wandte mich, und sahe an alle' (respectively 'It is for a person as it is for an animal' and 'I turned and looked upon everyone') grimly negate any faith in resurrection. Mourning the fundamental tragedy of existence, the *Vier ernste Gesänge* are unsentimental, profound testaments to Brahms's sympathy for suffering, stoical humanity, his belief in the virtue of hard work and the enduring power of love. Significantly, the German of Luther's Bible, with its blunt monosyllables, is that much plainer and rawer than the English of the Authorised Version.

With accompaniments that often evoke the orchestra in their depth and contrapuntal intricacy, the four songs move from the terrible nihilism of Ecclesiastes to the affirmative message of St Paul's sermon in his first Epistle to the Corinthians. In the process the unremitting minor mode of the first song, with its tolling funeral bell and swirling dusts, yields via the major-key closing sections of Nos 2 and 3 ('O Tod, wie bitter bist du' – 'O Death, how bitter are you') to the unalloyed major key of 'Wenn ich mit Menschen- und mit Engelszungen redete' ('If I speak with the tongues of humans and angels'), with its fervent peroration that 'there remain faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these three is love'.

DE PROFUNDIS

Without having a specific singer in mind, Brahms composed the *Vier ernste Gesänge* for a baritone voice whose armoury encompassed strong low notes – a *sine qua non* in these songs – and, at the climax of No 4, a resonant top G. Beginning with **Alexander Kipnis** in 1936, the songs have, unsurprisingly, been appropriated by basses and bass-baritones, with consequent downward transposition. The danger here, of course, is an unmitigated gloomfest. With his grandly sonorous basso profundo in its regal prime, Kipnis, with a backwardly balanced Gerald Moore, intones the opening like an Old Testament prophet, and distils an infinite life-weariness in the life-abnegating No 2. He fines his voluminous tone to a velvet, perfectly focused *pianissimo* in No 3's closing lullaby to Death, where the desolate falling thirds that permeate the second and

third songs are transformed by inversion into assuaging rising sixths. Two points of style slightly mitigate the dark splendour of Kipnis's singing: his tendency to aspirate, especially in Nos 2 and 4, and to slide rather wantonly between notes, making for moments of rhythmic sloppiness in No 4.

Subduing the might of his Wagnerian bass-baritone in the opening song, **Hans Hotter**, also with Gerald Moore, exudes a mournful grandeur, bowing Brahms's incantatory lines like a cello. This chastened King Lear distils a sense of vast, cosmic sadness, whether in the long diminuendo that closes the first song, or his numb, hollow tones at 'Da lobte ich die Toten' ('Wherefore I praised the dead') in No 2, the cycle's nadir. Hotter's *pianissimo* singing sometimes sounds 'yawned'. But unlike the sternly implacable Kipnis, his performance admits of human compassion. The quasi-heroic opening of No 4 tempts many interpreters into hearty extroversion. Not so Hotter, who never loses a quality of awed inwardness. Gerald Moore, again, suffers in the balance, though not so as to obscure his exquisite voicing of the lapping suspensions in No 3.

Still in bass territory, **Robert Holl** matches his one-time teacher Hotter in sombre depth, but not in insight, nor in evenness of production. In both his recordings, with András Schiff and Graham Johnson (where his craggy tone is less focused and the high notes sound effortful), Holl often lunges crudely into individual notes rather than cultivating a true, bound line. He has his moments, not least in the eerie descents to the abyss in No 2. But on the whole I find it hard to live with his monochrome timbre and coarse-sounding emphases.



The composer's beloved Clara; the title page of Four Serious Songs, the last songs he ever wrote

Two basses of a younger generation, **Alastair Miles** and **Jonathan Lemalu**, are more scrupulous in their vocal production. While his soft singing can lack inner intensity, Miles distils a grave stoicism in the first two songs; like Kipnis's and Holl's, his vocal colouring is unrelievedly dark, though the mobile tempos chosen by him and pianist Marie-Noëlle Kendall go some way to mitigating the gloom. Lemalu's rather warmer tones fall agreeably on the ear, and his pianist, Roger Vignoles, balances Brahmsian weight with ideal contrapuntal clarity. While hardly insensitive, Lemalu's singing tends to sound too robustly generalised. He's impressively incisive at the opening of No 4, but quite misses the intimate, *dolce*

quality requested by Brahms at 'Wir sehen jetzt durch einen Spiegel' ('For now we see through a glass darkly').

A TRIO FROM FISCHER-DIESKAU

Moving up to Brahms's original keys, **Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau**, in three recordings spanning a quarter of a century, dramatises the *Vier ernste Gesänge* with his trademark restless intensity. Even as a 24-year-old in 1949, the baritone makes you realise that sung German can be a beautiful language. Yet while the voice, round and full, was in its first ripeness, the expression is too externalised. Climaxes seem overblown, encapsulated by an indulgent lingering on that clinching top G – evidently a case of if you've got it, flaunt it.

Far more subtle and inward is his 1958 recording with Jörg Demus, a sensitive partner if technically stretched in the swirling dusts of No 1. No singer deploys such a wide palette of colours and dynamics; and his breath control in Brahms's ample phrases is a thing of wonder, all the more so from a 20-a-day smoker. No 3 epitomises the F-D approach: a searing, accusatory opening (you glimpse Death cowering in the corner) yielding to the most dulcet *mezza voce* in the longing-for-release of the E major close. Ever a master of colour and specific character, he drains the tone of its consolatory warmth on Brahms's contorted setting of 'erwarten' – the despair of the poor man with nothing to hope for in this life.

THE ELEGIAC CHOICE

Matthias Goerne, Christoph Eschenbach
Harmonia Mundi (HMC90 2174)

Amid stabs of protest and despair, Goerne's velvet baritone emphasises Brahms's



profound compassion for fearful, desolate humanity. At the close he and Eschenbach evoke the rapt, rarefied world of Brahms's late intermezzos.

THE MEZZO CHOICE

Janet Baker, André Previn
Warner Classics (20 discs) 903771-2

Kathleen Ferrier's majestically sung version remains a classic. Yet her de facto successor



Janet Baker, mining her deep contralto resonances, is far more personal and passionate in her responses, despite some provocatively slow tempos.

THE HISTORIC CHOICE

Hans Hotter, Gerald Moore
Warner Classics (562807-2)

Among basses, Kipnis is nonpareil for sonorous grandeur. Another great Wagnerian,



Hans Hotter, admits of more vulnerability and human sympathy. With his warmth and gentleness of tone, he shapes each song with grave inevitability.

By the time he recorded the songs with Daniel Barenboim in 1972, Fischer-Dieskau's tone had grown more tenorish, though he still has ample bass resonance for the chilling evocation of nothingness in No 2. Abetted by Barenboim's vivid 'orchestration' of the piano parts, Fischer-Dieskau now probes even greater expressive extremes. In the wild 'dust' music of No 1, his protesting vehemence shades into aggression, with full-frontal assaults on unsuspecting consonants. Each phrase of the final song is acutely characterised. Yet in his eagerness to make 'Dann aber werd ichs erkennen, gleich wie ich erkennet bin' ('Then shall I know even as I also am known') an epiphany, Fischer-Dieskau allows his tone to balloon, contradicting Brahms's mysterious harmonies and prescribed *piano* dynamic.

Fischer-Dieskau's contemporary **Hermann Prey**, against whom he was often pitted, likewise left multiple recordings of the *Vier ernste Gesänge*. At his finest in opera, especially roles requiring a touch of swagger, Prey sings with warmly resonant, free-soaring tone – impressive depth, too – but doesn't reliably locate the line between sentiment and sentimentality. With a 'back-leaning' tendency and consistently slow tempos, his 1957 version with the uninspiring Martin Mälzer too often sounds lugubrious. In 1973, doubtless encouraged by Gerald Moore, he allows Brahms's long-spanned phrases to flow more naturally. This is the best of Prey's recordings, though even here his softer singing lacks focused intensity and true *Innigkeit*.

A FEMININE PERSPECTIVE

While the *Vier ernste Gesänge* remain overwhelmingly colonised by basses and baritones (tenors, understandably, fight shy), they have also been fair game for contraltos and mezzos, most famously **Kathleen Ferrier**. In her two recordings, one with the American pianist John Newmark, the other with Malcolm Sargent and the BBC SO, Ferrier sings with the glorious dark-amber tone and broad phrasing that made her a national icon. Unlike most modern singers, she makes expressive use of portamento – controlled slides between notes. As Richard Fairman wrote in these pages: 'This is stoic and classical singing, with a biblical dignity.' Ferrier's palette of colour is limited, and Newmark is no more than a decent pianist. But her nobility of voice and sincerity of feeling make for a moving experience, not least at the close of No 3, where Ferrier's is the very voice of maternal solace.

Her recording with Sargent, in English translation, is something of a curiosity,



Hans Hotter: 'warmth and gentleness of tone' with Gerald Moore

however. It's superb singing per se, if rather more austere impersonal than her performance with Newmark. The sound, taken from a radio broadcast, is only just tolerable. Sargent's conducting can be lethargic, while his orchestrations tend to add an unwanted layer of comfortable upholstery, especially in No 2. The blowsy opening of No 4 confirms that Brahms's

slow tempos, especially at the opening of No 4, which has none of Brahms's prescribed *con anima*. There should be a sense of exultation here, however chastened.

Yet Baker communicates much more vividly than two rich-toned contraltos of a younger generation: **Nathalie Stutzmann** and **Marie-Nicole Lemieux**. While Lemieux, with a very ordinary pianist, is tepid

pianistic simulation of 'sounding brass' is so much more effective than the real thing.

In tandem with André Previn, **Janet Baker**, 1977 vintage, sings with her characteristic burning intensity. A rarefied *pianissimo* is not in her chosen palette of colours. You are not for a second in doubt that she has something urgent to impart: in the fierce social protest at the opening of No 2, and the Erda-like tonal depth at 'Da lobte ich die Toten' ('Wherefore I praised the dead'); or in the very human bitterness at the prospect of extinction in No 3. Baker and Previn – decent but not specially illuminating – choose some controversially

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS		RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1936	Alexander Kipnis, Gerald Moore	Music & Arts (M) ② D CD4661 (10/67 ^R , 7/97 ^R)
1949	Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Hertha Klust	Profil (F) PH05013 (7/05)
1949	Kathleen Ferrier, BBC SO / Malcolm Sargent [sung in English]	Somm (F) SOMMCD075 (9/08)
1950	Kathleen Ferrier, John Newmark	Naxos (B) 8 111009 (2/51 ^R)
1951	Hans Hotter, Gerald Moore	Warner Classics (M) D 562807-2 (9/52 ^R , 8/09 ^R)
1956	Kirsten Flagstad, Edwin McArthur	Decca Eloquence (S) ② ELQ480 1799 (1/70 ^R , 12/95 ^R)
1957	Hermann Prey, Martin Mälzer	Profil (F) ② PH18029
1958	Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Jörg Demus	DG Eloquence (S) ② ELQ480 3527 (10/61 ^R , 6/00 ^R)
1972	Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Daniel Barenboim	DG (B) ⑦ D 449 633-2GBJ7
c1973	Hermann Prey, Gerald Moore	DG (B) (20 discs) D 476 6867GH20
1977	Janet Baker, André Previn	Warner Classics (S) (20 discs) 903771-2 (11/78 ^R , A/13)
1990	Robert Holl, Andrés Schiff	Decca (M) D 433 182-2DH (6/93)
1996	Nathalie Stutzmann, Inger Södergren	RCA (M) D 09026 68660-2 (11/97)
2000	Thomas Quasthoff, Justus Zeyen	DG (M) D 471 030-2GH (8/01)
2001	Jonathan Lemalu, Roger Vignoles	Warner Classics (M) D 575203-2 (8/02)
2002	Christoph Gerhaher, Gerold Huber	Arte Nova (M) D 74321 92771-2
2004	Marie-Nicole Lemieux, Michael McMahon	Analekta (M) D AN2 9906 (3/05)
2008	Andreas Schmidt, Helmut Deutsch	CPO (F) CPO999 840-2
2010	Robert Holl, Graham Johnson	Hyperion (F) CDJ33124 (11/12)
2013	Alastair Miles, Marie-Noëlle Kendall	Signum (F) SIGCD369 (5/14)
2016	Matthias Goerne, Christoph Eschenbach	Harmonia Mundi (F) HMC90 2174 (9/16)
2016	Roderick Williams, Roger Vignoles	Champs Hill (M) ② CHRCD108 (6/17)

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of respondents experienced anxiety and panic attacks



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and word-shy, Stutzmann tends towards melodramatic extremes, compromising the legato with swells and bulges, often sliding into notes from below – a far cry from Ferrier's restrained portamento. In the closing stages of No 3 Stutzmann scoops and sobs like a wilting *verismo* heroine. Not my kind of Brahms.

Nor is the version by **Kirsten Flagstad**, the sole soprano in this survey (all the songs are transposed upwards). By 1956 the mighty Wagnerian voice had lost its former glowing resonance. Flagstad's high notes become squally when she unleashes her inner Brünnhilde in No 4. Like Stutzmann, she indulges in soupy, sentimentalising portamento in No 3. What Gerald Moore once dubbed Flagstad's 'absolutely simple, straight-from-the shoulder' style seems inadequate in songs that demand profound personal identification.

IN FISCHER-DIESKAU'S WAKE

German baritones who emerged in the 1980s and '90s tended to react against Fischer-Dieskau's engulfing intensity. His immediate successors on record were Olaf Bär and **Andreas Schmidt**, both with warmly lyrical voices and a contained, less demonstrative style than the master. Bär's upper register sounds slightly constricted, especially towards the close of Nos 3 and 4. But with unobtrusive colouring and pointing of their grim texts, he catches all the weary bleakness of the first two songs. Helmut Deutsch is among the most imaginative of accompanists, with an unerring feeling for Brahmsian rubato (EMI – nla).

Andreas Schmidt, likewise in close partnership with Deutsch, fields a more burnished, resonant baritone, and phrases in broad spans, with a care for true legato. The openings of Nos 1 and 2, both taken slowly, are calmly fatalistic, almost impassive, devoid of anguish – the antithesis of Fischer-Dieskau. Schmidt's performance is compelling in its understated way, though he sounds severe rather than tender both at the lulling close of No 3 and in the rapt cantilena ('Wir sehen jetzt durch einen Spiegel') in No 4.

The young **Christian Gerhaher**, 2002 vintage, already sings with a spontaneous urgency of communication, and a gift for locating the aching crux of Brahms's long, desolate phrases. Unlike Schmidt's, his tempo in the second song is a properly



Quasthoff's 'mellow, incisive' voice illuminates the biblical texts

mobile *Andante*; and the hushed intensity of Gerhaher's singing is matched by pianist Gerold Huber, etching Brahms's cross-rhythms and grieving in dialogue with the voice at 'Und siehe, da waren Tränen' ('And behold, there were tears'). Gerhaher infuses his tone with yearning tenderness in the death-longing of No 3, and conveys a feeling of tense excitement without a hint of heartiness in No 4.

'Unaffected' and 'un-portentous' were epithets that immediately sprang to mind when listening to **Roderick Williams**, with Roger Vignoles, whose playing is a model of lucidity and subtly observed detail. Like Gerhaher and Huber they choose naturally flowing tempos, reminding us that Brahms marked the first two songs *Andante* rather than *Adagio*. Williams's mellifluous, kindly baritone – a voice of light rather than darkness – doesn't encompass baleful gravitas. His is an intensely human reading that, perhaps more than any other, seems addressed personally to the listener. In both No 2 and the opening of No 3, where singer and pianist create a vivid sense of dialogue, Williams distils a compassionate sadness, devoid of protest or indignation. No 4, lyrical rather than declamatory, is conceived on the same intimate scale as the three preceding songs.

Both Williams and Gerhaher would be on my 'short-shortlist' for the *Vier ernste Gesänge*. Yet the performances that moved me most deeply were those by **Thomas Quasthoff**, with Justus Zeyen, and **Matthias Goerne**, with Christoph Eschenbach. Inspired by their superb pianists, both singers combine an acute

moment-by-moment response to text and music with a quality of humility. In No 2 Goerne flares up, shockingly, at the plight of the oppressed ('Und die ihnen Unrecht taten'); and he vividly dramatises the contrasts in No 4. Yet with his warmly rounded, soft-grained baritone, he gives the songs an unusually elegiac cast, epitomised by the sorrowful restraint of No 2's final arching phrases, and the opening of No 3, here an almost regretful address to Death.

Quasthoff similarly lives and dramatises the biblical texts. His mellow yet incisive bass-baritone, with its ringing upper register, admits of more light than Goerne's. Abetted by Justus Zeyen's clarity of articulation and colouristic flair (no pianist *sings* more eloquently), Quasthoff veers between anxiety and terror in the fast section. Like

Williams and Gerhaher, he (and Zeyen) chooses an aptly flowing tempo for No 2; and with a gentle lift to the rhythms, the song here becomes a transfigured *valse triste* (shades of the waltz-cum-march in the second movement of Brahms's *German Requiem*). Quasthoff creates a blanched, awed *sotto voce* for the contemplation of non-existence, lingering over the stark consonants at 'Und der noch nicht ist' ('And whoever does not yet exist'). His singing, here and elsewhere, has the eloquence of heightened speech.

In extreme contrast to the rueful Goerne, Quasthoff rails ferociously at Death's cruelty in No 3. And at the fourth song's climax he rides the leaps and plunges of Brahms's vaulting line – unlike most singers, including Goerne, he chooses the composer's preferred low notes – before finding his most honeyed colouring for the final humanist message that the power of love surpasses all else: a serene and sublime epilogue to songs that Brahms, with typical ironic self-deprecation, dubbed 'my godless harvesters' frolics'. Some harvest. **G**

TOP CHOICE

Thomas Quasthoff, Justus Zeyen
DG  471 030-2GH

Mingling awed gravitas and assuaging tenderness, Thomas Quasthoff responds with spontaneous-sounding intensity to



every shade of verbal and musical meaning in these mighty songs. Justus Zeyen is a challenging, ever-illuminating pianist partner.

PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

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Tchaikovsky Competition, June 17-29

Held just every four years, the International Tchaikovsky Competition is one of the most famous international musical contests, with past winners including pianists Van Cliburn, Grigory Sokolov and Daniil Trifonov, soprano Deborah Voigt, and violinists Gidon Kremer and Viktoria Mullova. Size-wise it's also huge, because unlike other competitions that rotate disciplines, the Tchaikovsky runs all of its genres in each competition. Plus, this year, wind and brass are added for the very first time alongside the established piano, voice, violin and cello. Then, beyond the prestige and cash rewards that accompany a win, the competition also offers the chance to perform before an array of major – and influential – stars. For instance, Valery Gergiev heads the main jury, while the piano jury under Denis Matsuev features Barry Douglas, Nelson Freire and Menahem Pressler, and the cello jury under Sir Clive Gillinson features Mischa Maisky, Myung-Wha Chung and Truls Mørk. You can catch it all, either live or on catch-up, on medici.tv.

tchaikovskycompetition.com, medici.tv

Tromsø, Norway & live online

Top of the World Piano Competition, June 15-21

Taking place in Norway's midnight-sun city, Tromsø, this biennial competition is open to pianists of all nationalities aged between 17 and 35, with the prizes up for grabs including a cash first prize of €30,000. While it's a relatively small competition in comparison to some of this month's heavyweights, it should nevertheless make for some interesting armchair adjudicating, not least because there are some interesting figures amongst this year's competitors. Take London-based Georgian pianist Luka Okros, winner of the Verbier Festival's Tabor Foundation Piano Award, who is also one of the young artists whom France's Festival d'Auvergne has supported in making a first recording, and who this July has his Purcell Room debut. The whole competition is being streamed live on its website.

topoftheworld.no

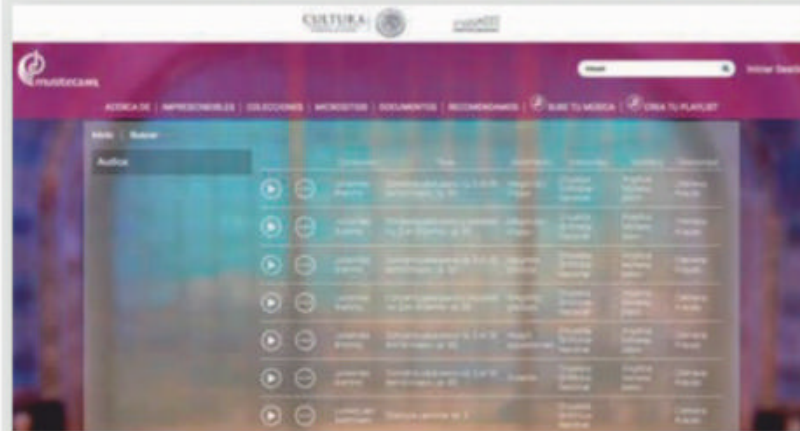
Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama, St David's Hall & BBC

BBC Cardiff Singer of the World, June 15-22

The 2019 edition of this major biennial competition boasts a multi-international line-up of 20 singers from 15 countries,

ARCHIVE CONCERT REVIEW

Clemens Krauss's last concert – Brahms and Beethoven in Mexico



Beethoven • Brahms

It is commonly written of Clemens Krauss that he died while on tour with the Vienna Philharmonic, but in fact his last concerts with them took place in April 1954. In May he travelled to Mexico for two programmes with the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional and died there of heart failure on April 16 (a condition exacerbated by high altitude?), but not before conducting – on that day – the Second Piano Concerto of Brahms in a performance that has turned up on Musitexa, an online national sound archive run by the Mexican Ministry of Culture.

The soloist was Angélica Morales – Mexican herself, and the wife of Emil von Sauer – and the performance is a remarkable one, splashy at points

but drawing a single line through the piece in a way quite foreign to most modern, more monumental approaches to the piece. Krauss moulds his accompaniment accordingly, attentive to the ebb and flow of her rubato, while his

ear for orchestral balances – such a distinguishing mark of his Wagner at Bayreuth – turns up any number of unusual voicings and not only in the more lightly scored second half of the concerto.

The concert concluded with Beethoven's *Leonora* Overture No 3 (though Musitexa advertises the Second) – again urgent, acutely sensitive to the dramatic character of each theme, and well worthy of a delirious (Mexican?) reception. The sound is no better than you'd expect of a flat transfer – 'no editado' – without work done to equalize levels, remove radio hiss, tape hum or other artefacts. Tolerant ears will turn up buried treasure. **Peter Quantrill**

Type 'Krauss' into the search box at musitexa.mx/buscar

their performances supported by pianists Llŷr Williams and Simon Lepper, and the competition's two resident orchestras, the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and the Welsh National Opera Orchestra. Venues-wise, the song prize rounds are hosted by the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama, while the main prize rounds and final take place at St David's Hall. It's worth saying also that this is one worth making the trip to Cardiff for, because the city is also playing host to a surrounding programme of fringe events such as films, recitals, masterclasses and talks. Still, don't worry if you can't make it to Cardiff, because the BBC airwaves will be awash with the competition, and while specific details of the remote viewing and listening options weren't available as we went to press, we can tell you that this will feature more live television coverage than ever before.

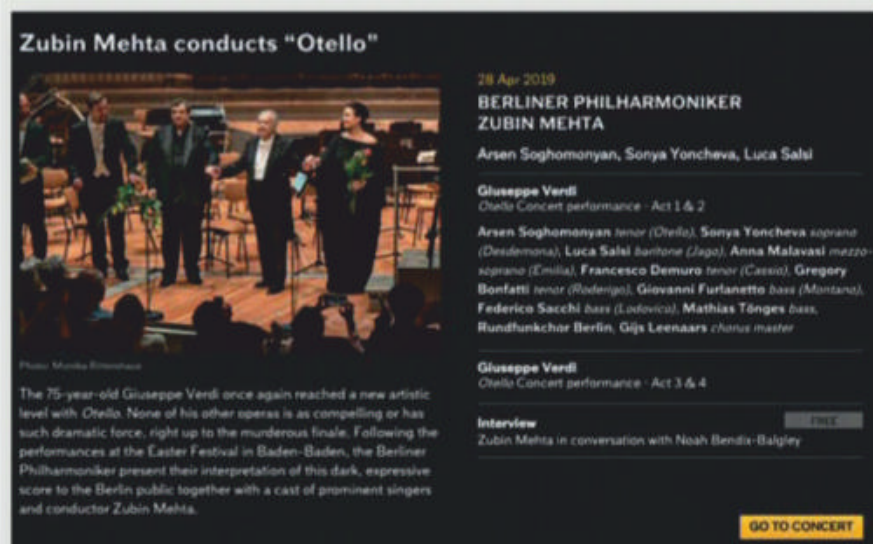
bbc.co.uk/cardiffsinger

Elbphilharmonie, Hamburg & live online

Final of the TONALi competition, June 22

The Hamburg-based cultural project TONALi inspires around 40,000 children and young people through classical music every year with an instrumental competition and a music education programme, and the TONALi competition for young rising stars is both one of its highlight events, and one which is thoroughly internationally relevant. In 2015, for instance, the competition was won by current BBC New Generation Artist, Anastasia Kobekina (from Russia). The 2019 competition is for pianists and hosted by the Elbphilharmonie, and the final – for which the three finalists are to be accompanied by the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen under Elim Chan – will be streamed live on the Elbphilharmonie's website. Be warned that the commentary will all be in German, but don't let that stop you watching

Zubin Mehta conducts the Berlin Philharmonic and the 2019 Baden-Baden Festival cast in Verdi's *Otello*



Verdi

In limbo between the Rattle and Petrenko eras, the Berlin Philharmonic opted for the veteran Zubin Mehta to conduct this year's Easter opera, *Otello*, at Baden-Baden. The now traditional concert

transfer back to the Philharmonie features a slightly different cast, with the Armenian tenor Arsen Soghomonyan taking over from Stuart Skelton in the title-role. It's wonderful to hear Verdi's masterful score performed with such clarity, agility and heft by the Berliners, but one's occasionally

left wishing it was already Petrenko on the podium – Mehta's approach is steady and stately in a way that underplays the work's visceral power.

As for the cast, Soghomonyan is a terrific singer and performs nobly. He

has the right sort of powerful baritone voice with an appealingly plangent edge, but he loses incisiveness as he tires and his acting could be more detailed – a tendency to hold a hand to his temple at *moments critiques* as if speaking on his mobile doesn't help. Luca Salsi is a suave, smart, if slightly avuncular Iago, savouring his words deliciously. Sonya Yoncheva makes for a voluptuous, unusually fiery Desdemona. With fine supporting cast, and despite Mehta's measured approach, Verdi and Boito's drama comes across potently and movingly.

Hugo Shirley

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when this is set to be such a good night of music making.

elbphilharmonie.de/de/programm/tonali19-finale/12514

Wigmore Hall, London & live online

Ensemble Marsyas, June 24

The Edinburgh-based Ensemble Marsyas under the direction of Peter Whelan specialise in the historically informed performance of repertoire from the 18th century. This Wigmore Hall concert is an all-Mozart programme which begins with his Serenade in B flat, K361, *Gran Partita*, followed by the Serenade in C minor, K388, *Night Music*. The concert is being live-streamed on Wigmore Hall's website.

wigmore-hall.org.uk/watch-listen/live-stream

Poznan Opera & live on OperaVision

Moniuszko's *Paria*, June 30

Stanisław Moniuszko may sometimes be referred to as 'the father of Polish opera', but it's fair to say that he's less of a well known figure outside of his homeland. So it's perhaps no surprise that this particular performance of the last of his six operas, the India-set *Paria* ('The Pariah'), comes from Poznan. However this could well be a performance to reel in a few new fans for his work. Graham Vick directs, while the music itself comes courtesy of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra Katowice under Gabriel Chmura. The cast consists of Dominik Sutowicz as the warrior Idamor, Szymon Kobyliński as the High Priest Akebar, and Mońika Mych-Nowicka as his daughter Neala. Pavlo Tolstoy sings Ratef, and Dzares is sung by Mikołaj Zalasieński.

operavision.eu

Trafalgar Square, London & live on YouTube

Simon Rattle conducts the LSO in BMW

Classics, June 30

The aim of this free BMW Classics summer concert from Simon Rattle and the London Symphony Orchestra is to give everyone access to world-class music in one of the world's most celebrated public spaces, and if you can't be one of the 7000 people in the square itself then you can instead watch it streamed on YouTube. The programme is a dance-inspired one which, in addition to 100 LSO musicians, features 55 young musicians from the LSO On Track programme in East London, along with 20 musicians from the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. On the menu are a selection of Dvořák *Slavonic Dances*, the world premiere of *Tuqus* by Bushra El-Turk, a selection from Poulenc's suite *Les biches* and, to conclude, Ravel's *La valse*.

youtube.com/lso

Teatro Real, Madrid & live on OperaVision

Il trovatore, 6 July

Madrid's Teatro Real is describing Francesco Negrín's new production for them of Verdi's *Il trovatore* (a co-production with the Opéra de Monte-Carlo and the Royal Danish Opera of Copenhagen) as 'big', and thanks to OperaVision's live stream we'll be able to check out that analysis for ourselves. Certainly though, the cast under the baton of conductor Maurizio Benini is full of renowned Verdi stars: Ludovic Tézier sings the Count di Luna, with Maria Agresta as Leonora and Ekaterina Semenchuk as Azucena. Francesco Meli sings Manrico, and Roberto Tagliavini sings Ferrando.

teatroreal.es, operavision.eu

Munich Opera Festival & live then on demand at staatsoper.de

Petrenko conducts Strauss's *Salome*, July 6

Krzysztof Warlikowski's new production of Richard Strauss's intense and shattering biblical drama for the Munich Opera Festival aims to put the opera within its contemporary context of Strauss and Oscar Wilde, while also exploring what Christianity and the history of the 20th century can bring to our understanding of it. The cast itself is a knock-out one, too: joining Kirill Petrenko is Marlis Petersen in the title-role, joined by Wolfgang Koch as Jochanaan, Wolfgang Ablinger-Sperrhacke as Herod and Michaela Schuster as Herodias.

staatsoper.de

Royal Opera House, Covent Garden & live on OperaVision

Gardiner conducts *Le nozze di Figaro*, July 9

David McVicar's much-loved production of Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* is an oldie but a goodie, and this particular revival offers both a stellar cast, and the very easiest and cheapest of remote viewing options. You can watch it from home for free, courtesy of OperaVision. As for Sir John Eliot Gardiner's stellar cast, this features Christian Gerhaher as Figaro, Joëlle Harvey as Susanna, Simon Keenlyside as Count Almaviva, Julia Kleiter as the Countess, Kangmin Justin Kim as (a countertenor) Cherubino, Maurizio Muraro as Bartolo and Diana Montague as Marcellina. Little Barbarina meanwhile is sung by the Chilean Jette Parker Young Artist, soprano Yaritza Véliz, making her company debut.

roh.org.uk, operavision.eu

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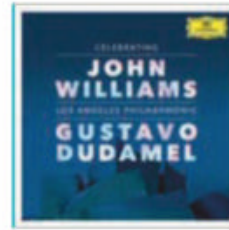
THIS MONTH A classic reinvented by Quad, bargain high-end earphones and the latest show news from Munich.

Andrew Everard,
Audio Editor

JULY TEST DISCS



A delightful Mozart set by the Ssens Trio on LAWO Classics: superb performances made all the more sparkling in DSD64, 128 and even 256!



'Spectacular' is perhaps the best word for the sound of this John Williams celebration by the LA Phil under Dudamel, in 96kHz/24 bit

Revivals and new arrivals

From retro speakers to a high-end SACD/CD player, there's something for everyone in the latest hi-fi releases

However you look at them, the newly reintroduced Klipsch La Scala AL5 speakers will have an imposing presence in any listening room. Originally introduced as a professional-use model in 1963, the design took its name from the Milan opera house and featured a horn-loaded three-way design, delivering sufficient efficiency to allow it to be driven to high levels with the low-power amplifiers of the time.

The new AL5 version **1**, selling for £12,000 a pair, maintains that high sensitivity at 105dB/2.83V/1m but uses more modern materials in its drivers, mounted in an imposing cabinet built from 2.5cm-thick panels of birch ply and MDF. This may be a smaller version of the company's famous Klipschorn speaker but it's still 101.6cm tall, 61.6cm wide and 64.3cm deep. The upper section houses the 25mm compression tweeter in its Tractrix horn and a 5cm mid-range compression driver, also horn-loaded, while the lower enclosure contains a massive 38.1cm bass unit in a dual folded horn.

The speakers weigh 91kg apiece and come in a choice of Natural Cherry, Satin Black Ash or American Walnut finishes. They're available to order from UK distributor Henley Audio's roster of dealers and are on demonstration by appointment at the company's Oxfordshire HQ.

Also reviving a model from the past is Harman International, which is launching the JBL L100 Classic **2**, a modern version of the 1970 L100 original. The new design, at £4000 a pair, retains the look of the original, complete with the vintage Quadrex foam grille in a choice of

three colours – black, dark blue or burnt orange. Described as a bookshelf design, the speaker is actually quite large at 63.7cm tall, 39cm wide and 37.2cm deep, and is more commonly used on short floor stands, with its substantial walnut veneer enclosures giving it an all-up weight of 26.7kg for each speaker.

Behind that striking grille is a three-way design using a 25mm titanium-dome tweeter, a 13cm polymer-coated pulp-cone mid-range and driver and a hefty 30cm pulp-cone bass unit, and the speaker has attenuators to adjust the level of the treble and mid-range. Suitable for amplifiers from 24 to 200W, the L100 Classic has 90dB/W/m sensitivity.

Very much not retro is the P9 wireless speaker from Belgian company Escape **3**, which has been working on this design for four years. Selling for £999, the P9 has Bluetooth 4.2 wireless connectivity, a USB port for flash drives and a 3.5mm analogue input, and uses 24-bit DSP and 100W of amplification to drive four 7.5cm full-range drivers and a 20cm subwoofer.

Solidly built – it weighs 12.3kg – and with an integral carrying handle, the P9 is weatherproof for outdoor use and the internal rechargeable battery is good for eight hours' use. A travel case is available as a £99 option and the P9 can also be used with a £20 'Aux 2' kit, enabling it to be used with a ChromeCast audio device.

The latest addition to the range from German company T+A is the £13,996 PDT 3100 HV SACD/CD transport **4**, which is accompanied by two new digital-to-analogue converters – the £21,990 SD



3100 HV and the £23,400 SDV 3100 HV. The transport is a dedicated audio device, with a slide-out mechanism using a custom-made drive and decoder, complete with a puck to hold the disc in place, and as well as the usual digital outputs features a hi-res IPA link to allow ultra-high-resolution data to be transmitted to the DACs. The two converters handle DSD at up to DSD1024/49.2MHz and PCM to 768kHz/32 bit, and the pricier SDV

3100 HV integrates pre-amplifier functions and can be used straight into a power amplifier.

Finally, three new foldable studio-style headphone models from AKG **5**, which has a long heritage in professional microphones and headphones. The entry-level model is the closed-back K175, at £109, which uses 40mm drivers. The K245, at £20 more, is a semi-open design with 50mm drivers, while the K275 (£149), uses the same drivers in closed-back housings. **6**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Quad Vena II/S-1

The celebrated British brand has upgraded its compact amplifier, and it makes a very convincing system with its matching speakers

While Quad may have a reputation as one of the most sober of hi-fi companies, as one might expect given its nearly 85 years of heritage and the 70 years since its first commercial product appeared in 1949, it has never been afraid to ignore conventional thinking and follow its own path. After all, the best-known Quad development, its electrostatic speakers, were a long way from the designs of the time when they appeared in 1957 and remain so to this day, many generations later. The latest models may not be the only ones of their kind these days – and like the rest of the range they may now be made in China, not Cambridgeshire – but they remain uniquely Quad and instantly recognisable.

And Quad likes to spring surprises, such as its slick 77 Series back in 1999, its compact separates interlinked with data cables and the whole operated by a hefty tabletop handset with two-way communication, putting the displays in the palm of the user's hand. However, at a time when the company was building its range around the 'designer' Artera-style components, the 2014 arrival of the Vena amplifier came completely out of the blue, bringing together elements of the company's classic style with the wherewithal to make the most of trends such as Bluetooth wireless connectivity and 'computer audio'.



QUAD VENA II/S-1

Type Integrated amplifier

Price £649, or £749 in 'wood-sleeved' versions

Output power 45Wpc into 8 ohms, 65Wpc into 4 ohms

Analogue inputs MM phono, two line-in

Digital inputs Coaxial and two optical, USB Type B

Analogue outputs One pair of speakers, pre-out, headphones

Digital outputs Coaxial and optical

File formats PCM to 192kHz (via optical/coaxial), to 384kHz/DSD256 (via USB)

Accessories supplied Remote handset

Finishes Lancaster Grey; mahogany and gloss black/white optional

Dimensions (WxHxD) 30.1 x 9.5 x 31.3cm

QUAD S-1

Type Two-way speaker

Price £499, or £350 when bought with amplifier

Drivers 12x45mm ribbon tweeter, 10cm Kevlar-cone mid/bass

Sensitivity 84dB/W/m

Impedance '8 ohm compatible'

Recommended amp power 25-150W

Finishes Black ash (as supplied in package), mahogany

Dimensions (HxWxD) 28.5 x 15.6 x 24cm (+3cm for terminals)

quad-hifi.co.uk

The style was a similar story, with a taste of the retro in the compact dimensions and single main control for volume, all finished in the company's Lancaster Grey as standard. For those wanting an even more nostalgic look, the amplifier was available in a wood-veneered sleeve – parent company IAG's factory has a real way with paper-thin sheets of timber – or you could evoke a bit of Swinging Sixties with a choice of black or white lacquer.

Above all, the amplifier was just the thing for fitting into small spaces, being just 30cm wide, and proved itself capable of rather remarkable levels of performance. Hearing it in action driving Quad electrostatics at the Bristol show just after its launch had me keen to give it a try, and it more than lived up to that early promise when I got it into my own system.

Now, some five years on, there's a new version of the little amp, the Vena II, and

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PRO-JECT ESSENTIAL E

Pro-Ject's Essential E, its latest entry-level turntable, comes complete with a fitted Ortofon cartridge.



ATACAMA NEXUS

The S-1 speakers sound best when clear of walls and on solid stands, such as these Atacama Nexus models.



at first glance I wondered why the company had bothered: it looks just like the model it replaces, with which there was absolutely nothing wrong in the first place. But there's more going on here than meets the eye, even if the amplifier still comes in all-over grey as standard at £649, with the wood-sleeved version raising the price by £100 in a choice of Sapele Mahogany, gloss black or gloss white. Not only has there been some shuffling of the pack when it comes to the range of inputs the amplifier offers but there's also been some work done behind that matt metal fascia.

The most obvious addition is a moving magnet phono stage, to which a turntable can be connected for vinyl playback, alongside two line inputs, but the company has also upped the ante in the digital department. The original Vena, with its Cirrus Logic DAC, was limited to 192kHz/24-bit playback but the new version benefits from ESS Technology's

This little set-up proves highly attractive, whether fed from a turntable, analogue line inputs or a computer

Sabre32 ES9018K2M converter, stretching its capabilities to 384kHz/32 bit and DSD256. With its wide dynamics and low distortion, the DAC is supported by an active filter implementation especially designed to bring out the best of its abilities and is fed from a choice of two optical digital inputs and one coaxial, plus a USB Type B for really hi-res content from a computer. The amplifier also has both coaxial and optical outputs, even if I can't quite work out how these would be useful.

Work has been done to improve the power and dynamics of the amplifier, which delivers 45W per channel. There's a new transformer, while the pre-amp stage is kept simple in the quest for clean signal paths. Headphone users will appreciate the dedicated output section feeding the front-panel socket, while in addition to the single set of speaker outputs there's also a pair of pre-amp outputs to feed an external power amp, active speakers or even a subwoofer.

PERFORMANCE

The Vena II is also available in Lancaster Grey packaged with a pair of Quad's very good S-1 speakers in Black Oak, the whole system selling for £999. That saves £150 compared to buying the two separately and also makes a very neat, fine-sounding system.

The S-1 is the smallest model in the company's five-strong S series, and with its ribbon tweeter harks back to Quad's 1949 Corner Ribbon speaker. However, the modern treble unit is rather more robust than those delicate designs, being of a sandwich construction to help it handle the output of higher-powered amplifiers. This 12x45mm driver is partnered here with a 10cm mid/bass unit with a woven Kevlar cone, with the crossover set at 3.2kHz and bass tuning via a rear-venting reflex port.

Just as the high-quality woodwork of the speakers complements the solidity of build of the Vena II, so the two combine to create a sound as sweet as it is dramatic, with plenty of impact in dynamics in the small- to medium-size rooms to which set-up is particularly well suited. Considering the compact dimensions of this system, with the speakers standing just 28.5cm tall, the presentation is big and rich, with no shortage of weight or substance, even with full orchestral forces.

Yes, that 'computer audio' input does mean that this package is well suited as a desktop system, as is the case with several other diminutive amplifiers; but with the speakers on bookshelves or even stands in the region of 60cm tall, it would also work well as a main system. The only proviso concerns the positioning of the speakers, which should be some 20cm from the rear wall to allow the port to work without creating boom and 30cm from side walls to avoid reflections. I also found toeing the speakers in towards the listening position helped sharpen the sonic image: it's good enough when they're just 'plonked' but takes on real three-dimensionality with a little extra effort.

That done, this little set-up proves highly attractive, whether fed from a turntable, analogue line inputs or a computer using the USB connection. Using the amplifier is simple and logical, and even hi-res music files are handled well, the Quad

Or you could try ...

The Quad is small but it is not the tiniest integrated amp on the market.

Pro-Ject MaiA S2

The Pro-Ject MaiA S2 is just 20cm wide and less than half the height at 3.6cm tall but can still deliver an impressive 25W per channel, which is more than enough to drive speakers of decent sensitivity. It also has a phono stage and both digital and analogue inputs, and sells for £425 – more details at project-audio.com.



NAD D 3020 amplifier

Taking a different approach, but again with a phono stage added in its latest V2 version, is NAD's D 3020 amplifier, which sells for £399. Analogue and digital inputs, plus Bluetooth, complete the specification and the 3020 can be used in either horizontal or vertical orientations to save space. Find out more at nadelectronics.com.



Marantz HD-AMP1

Retro appeal is core to the Marantz HD-AMP1, with styling echoing the company's amps of the past, down to the 'porthole' display and wood-effect side-cheeks. Selling for £749, it has analogue and digital inputs including USB Type B, delivers 50W per channel and handles files all the way up to DSD256. More information at marantz.co.uk.



set-up bringing out the extra sparkle of DSD content.

If you like the combination of modern facilities and retro style – I happen to think the Lancaster Grey basic model is more attractive than the wood-sleeved versions, but you may disagree – the Quad Vena II/S-1 system is as impressive as it is affordable. **G**

● REVIEW SHANLING ME100

In-ear excellence

These high-quality in-ear headphones have an expensive feel – and sound – at a surprisingly affordable price-point

Regular readers will have detected more than a little enthusiasm for the tiny Shanling M0 personal music player, which was reviewed in these pages back in last year's Awards issue – but then the brand has long been one of those hi-fi industry 'sleepers', just outside the mainstream but capable of pulling off the occasional coup with a product defying convention.

A decade or more back, the company launched one of those attention-grabbing products, in the form of its MC-30 system, which was quite unlike any other 'music centre' on the market by virtue of a top-mounted CD player, radio tuner and somewhere to connect your iPod, not to mention the prominent use of valve amplification and a budget price tag in the region of £500. It drew on all of the company's experience in audio design and engineering, which began back in 1988 but really got under way when it moved to that hub of manufacture for all things electronic – Shenzhen, China – in 1996 and launched itself under the Shanling name. For almost 20 years the company built a reputation for high-end disc players and amplification, just without the high-end pricing, but it wasn't until 2014 that it moved into personal music players, flying in the face of the seemingly unstoppable rise of the smartphone.

As the entry-level personal player, the M0 repeated the MC-30's value-for-money trick: it's a truly tiny player, around the same size as the face of an Apple Watch, yet is capable of playing almost any music format – and doing so very well – for less than £100. Cased in titanium, milled from a solid block and available in a range of colours, it has a strikingly bright and crisp, if tiny touchscreen display; and as well as being a player can both send and receive music via Bluetooth, and even act as a digital-to-analogue converter for a connected computer.

If the quality of this very inexpensive machine showed the company's expertise in materials processing and finishing, then the new ME100 earphones carry on that tradition. Here we have a model that looks, feels and sounds very expensive, entering a market hardly lacking for upmarket in-ear headphones carrying a price tag of just

£100, despite the extent of the in-house design and engineering behind it.

You see, one of the secrets of Shanling is that it's a company unwilling to buy in technology when it can make it for itself. So the ME100 uses both custom drive units and housings, ensuring both sound quality and durability, not to mention comfort in use.

The 10mm drivers employ a 'nanocomposite' of two polymers – PEEK (polyether ether ketone) and the more familiar polythene – and use the differing properties of each to create a diaphragm able to deliver a clean, balanced sound. This is driven by an in-house 'motor' built for efficiency and control, thanks to powerful magnets and a lightweight voice-coil, and the whole driver assembly is mounted in a solid aluminium housing.

Playing solo piano through them gives an enticing impression of the weight of the instrument

The material was chosen for its inert qualities and durability, and is shaped externally for a comfortable fit and within to damp down resonances, adding to the clarity of the sound. The cable fitted is a 1.3m eight-core oxygen-free copper type, sheathed in thermoplastic elastomer to damp down mechanical noise, and fitted with MMCX connectors at the earpiece end and a 3.5mm plug at the other.

PERFORMANCE

The impression of luxury starts as soon as you unbox the ME100 earphones. Removing the outer sleeve of the packaging reveals a box, inside which sit the earphones themselves inside a rigid travel case, while foam inserts in the box contain the interchangeable eartips, arranged in rows. There are three sizes of tip designed to optimise bass, three offering vocal enhancement, two sizes of 'balanced' sound eartip and a one set of medium-size memory foam tips, all in addition to the standard medium-size tips already fitted to the earpieces. Under the holder for all these is a little box containing the simple instruction booklet – not that you need it – and a cleaning brush for the earpieces.



SHANLING ME100

Type In-ear headphones

Price £99

Frequency response 20Hz-40kHz

Impedance 16 ohms

Accessories included PU Leather carry-case, range of eartips, detachable cable, cleaning tool

shanling.com

hifiheadphones.co.uk

Spend some time experimenting with the different tip-sizes and types, as the fit and various designs do make a difference to the sound. I was torn between the medium-size 'vocal' tips and the memory foam pair but settled for the latter for most of my listening, simply because they gave the most comfortable fit and the best seal in the ear, excluding outside noise and giving clean, tight bass balanced with an explicit yet sweet midband and treble.

For all their cool metallic solidity, the earpieces are very light at around 5g apiece, with the whole set-up complete with cables and eartips weighing a mere 28g. That makes them supremely comfortable when in place, this enhancing their other great quality, which is their excellent sound. I tried them with everything from the tiny M0 player to Chord's Mojo/Poly, taking in players from Astell&Kern and Pioneer as well as plus my iPhone 8 Plus with adaptor along the way, and the inescapable conclusion is that these are very superior earphones at a very attractive price.

Playing solo piano through them gives an enticing impression of the weight of the instrument allied to the touch of the pianist, plus a thrilling sense of the acoustic in which the recording was made. This quality extends through accompanied voices and instruments to the intricacies of chamber ensembles. Even more impressive, though, is the ability of these tiny headphones to conjure up all the power and presence of a full orchestra while giving excellent insight into the performances going on under the skin of a complex work. Dynamics are dramatic, and the ability of the ME100s to convey great sweeps of scoring has to be heard to be believed. 🎧

● ESSAY

A Munich for the masses? Maybe not ...

Is the hi-fi industry losing sight of its roots as it 'premiumises'?



Money to burn? A Bugatti Chiron, Focal's Utopia Scala speaker, Astell&Kern's A&ultima SP2000, Goebel loudspeakers

‘Yes,’ said a colleague to me, as we sat drinking coffee in the press room at the High End Show in Munich, ‘but who’s it all for? I mean, I was just listening to a system I thought was quite acceptable, and then they told me the total cost was somewhere just over half a million. Have they taken leave of their senses?’

He had a point. Notwithstanding the fact that the name of the show should alert you to what you’re letting yourself in for, this year’s event – held at the beginning of May – did seem to have an awful lot of ‘if you need to ask the price, you can’t afford it’ systems. That £500,000 set-up my friend had heard was by no means extraordinary in the glass-and-steel halls of the MOC event venue: the fact that the entrance to one hall was dominated by a matt black Bugatti Chiron – yours for around \$3m, and with a \$20K+ bill every time you need it serviced – speaks volumes.

Not only that, but the ‘red rope syndrome’ has come to the High End Show. That Chiron sat amid an expanse of barricaded-off floorspace into which one had to wait to be invited, before removing your shoes and being allowed to sit in the car to experience its Accuton sound system. As you may expect, I found that rather a palaver, so passed it by to explore the main focus of my visit: home audio systems.

I’m not unfamiliar with systems with substantial price tags. They may be beyond the purview of these audio pages, which tend to concentrate on the more affordable end of the market, but of late I have listened to both amplifiers and speakers with six-figure labels on them. But while I consider myself to be a pretty dyed-in-the-wool audio enthusiast, there are times when I, too, find myself asking just who is the target market for some of this equipment.

For example, one of Europe’s leading speaker companies, French-based Focal, is

marking its 40th anniversary this year and took the opportunity of the Munich show to reveal a complete line-up of celebratory products. At the pinnacle of this range is an anniversary model of its Utopia Scala speaker, dubbed Scala 40th. Finished in a high-gloss black-silver finish created by the deposition of silver nitrate at the company’s Ebénisterie Bourgogne cabinet factory, this speaker marked the summit of the company’s Munich press conference.

All well and good, except for two things: the speakers will set you back €70,000 a pair – although this is still a long way short of the company’s £160K/pr Grande Utopia EM Evo flagship – and will be available in very limited quantities. Four pairs, in fact, which probably means one demo set for each of the major territories in which the company sells speakers, so hardly of much relevance to actual buyers.

There are times when I, too, find myself asking just who is the target market for some of this equipment

This ‘premiumisation’ also applies to the Focal’s 40th-anniversary headphone offering, the Symphonie 40th. Designed as a ‘home and away’ system, this comprises a pair of the company’s flagship Utopia ‘phones complete with Arche DAC/amplifier, plus a pair of Stella headphones and a Questyle QPM portable player. Exotic enough already; but the whole thing comes packaged in what is essentially a mahogany-veneered chest of drawers, individually numbered and selling at £15,000.

And Focal is far from alone in this. Portable audio experts Astell&Kern, no stranger to premium products, used the Munich show to reveal its new flagship pocket player, the A&ultima SP2000. Yes, it can handle audio all the way up to

768kHz/32 bit and DSD512; yes, it has separate signal paths for balanced and unbalanced outputs for optimal sound quality; and yes, it’s available in stainless steel or copper finishes ‘with a unique crown pattern volume/power wheel’. But it will set you back £2999.

Agreed, this pocket music player may represent pocket-money pricing for the new world of the super-affluent at which so much hi-fi now seems to be aimed, but I’m sure that mention of the patterning on the volume control is hardly coincidental in its use of watch-like terminology. The kind of buyer likely to spend many thousands on a watch seems to be the new focus for many hi-fi companies: the sort of person who’ll ignore all the ‘yes, but a Swatch tells the time just as well’ arguments, instead opting for an object of craftsmanship and visual appeal.

I get the whole idea of ‘chasing the money’, having discussed before in these pages the trend of forgetting the mass market and instead aiming to sell a relatively small number of high-ticket items delivering a more instant and substantial return on investment. Trouble is, I find increasingly that, desirable though these objects may be – well, some of them, anyway – I’m less sure what kind of value they offer in terms of pure sonic performance. I may be getting on a bit, having had a significant birthday on the opening day of the High End Show, but gone are the days when I returned from such a show with a nagging dissatisfaction with my own system and an urge to make improvements.

Instead, while there were some acceptable-sounding systems on display in Munich, all too often I found the quality of the music drowned out by the need for visual impact and the excited trumpeting of telephone-number prices by those demonstrating. ⑥

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NOTES & LETTERS

BBC Philharmonic • Christopher Hogwood • Rachmaninov and Vaughan Williams

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Praise for the BBC Phil

The BBC orchestras have been rightly praised for their remarkable work over many years but I would like to use your pages to say, in particular, 'hats off' to the BBC Philharmonic – with the loyal and magnificent support of Chandos.

The Philharmonic's recordings of less well-trodden areas of orchestral repertoire provide consistently stimulating, top-quality performances in brilliant recordings ... the sheer adventurousness from a record label is something of a wake-up call to other, let's say, less enlightened sources. We've had symphonies by Bax, Dutilleux and Dohnányi, of all people. The Roussel discs conducted by Yan-Pascal Tortelier are outstanding – please let's now have properly idiomatic performances of the four symphonies from this team (for pity's sake not just the Third). There's plenty of room.

The two discs of works by Franz Schreker under Vassily Sinaisky are both astonishing, the orchestra at full tilt in brilliant displays of Schreker's mastery of the orchestral art. They are incomprehensibly underrated and undermentioned, even in Christian Hoskins's recent review (2/19) of an all-Schreker disc from Capriccio, welcome as it was as is water in a desert, how can it be that no comparative mention was made of either of the BBC Philharmonic recordings? While symphonic cycles from the likes of Brahms, Shostakovich and Sibelius just won't go away in spite of already overcrowded lists, I shall wait with eager anticipation for the BBC Phil's and Chandos's next step into the semi-darkness.

David Elwin, via email

Hooray for Hogwood

I was pleased to see Christopher Hogwood featured in Icons (June, page 66). While Lindsay Kemp focused upon his legacy as an early music pioneer, in the early days of his career, Hogwood was also a tireless broadcast presenter of *The Young Ideas* on BBC Radio 3 for 12 years. In addition, he also offered masterclasses throughout his career.

As Kemp insightfully pointed out, Hogwood was keen on creating a new sound world by 'removing the dirty varnish of an old painting'. In 2003,

Letter of the Month

Luciano Pavarotti – second to none!

I greatly enjoyed Michael Haas's reminiscing about Pavarotti recording *Otello* in Chicago (June, page 22). Pavarotti's desire to be the dominant voice in Decca operas was well known. As a young lawyer who acted for Decca in the 1970s I was often invited to Kingsway Hall for evening recording sessions where I sat in the control box with the sound engineer.

One session was the occasion of Dame Joan Sutherland's 50th birthday, the work *La traviata*, with Luciano Pavarotti as Alfredo. I sat with the great Jimmy Lock controlling the sound and balance console; Chris Raeburn the Producer was controlling movement in the famed Decca sonic stage box of numbers in which the singers moved to achieve the full stereo effect. Pavarotti always strained to the front of the box he was meant to be in and often over the line aiming to be loudest, even in the presence of Joan Sutherland; Lock the consummate recording professional moved a finger on the console gradually back as Big Lucy moved forward.



Kicked out of the box for the session play back I would later return to hear the Decca team's report. 'Perfect balance' called Chris Raeburn. Lock gave me a smile and winked; he had again contained Pavarotti. We all adjourned to enjoy the birthday cake presented to Sutherland!

Richard Linsell, via email

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when being invited to offer a masterclass to the student orchestra in Hong Kong, he led the students to perform Mozart's *Haffner* Symphony. After listening to their own performance first, he offered the students his scores, with notes on bowings, and explained concisely and accurately the classical style. His guidance worked marvels: in the following session, the student orchestra offered a brilliant performance of the

final movement, with a totally different spirit and tone colours.

Near the end of his life, from 2010 to 2014, he was also the Gresham Professor of Music. Those lectures were open to the public, and free of charge. Those who remember him primarily as an early music pioneer will be surprised to see how wide his music tastes actually were. All those lectures are still available online for the public to appreciate: richly

rewarding hours are guaranteed! [See the Gresham College YouTube channel.]

Earlier this year, after a fascinating recital, Robert Levin told me he still wants to pick up the thread of the unfinished Mozart piano concerto cycle with the Academy of Ancient Music and Hogwood. It has been nearly five years since Hogwood passed away. He may no longer be with us, yet the torch still burns bright.

*Wei-Chin Chen
Taipei, Taiwan*

Rachmaninov's tears

I have just read with interest Oliver Trigg's letter (June 2019, page 132) and can indeed confirm that Rachmaninov was moved to tears at the premiere of Vaughan Williams's *Serenade to Music*.

My piano teacher, Phyllis Sellick, the dedicatee of VW's solo piano miniature *The Lake in the Mountains* was a close friend of VW and later of Rachmaninov (her husband, Cyril Smith, was one of

Rachmaninov's most admired interpreters) and she sat in the Royal Albert Hall box alongside Rachmaninov for the VW premiere; it was, she said, intensely moving to witness Rachmaninov's tears on that occasion.

Incidentally, Rachmaninov always found time to have tea with Phyllis and Cyril when he visited London and, as Phyllis enjoyed telling her students, he always said the same three words on taking his leave – 'work, work, work'.
Mark Bebbington, via email

Editorial note

David Fanning writes: In my review of the Deutsche Grammophon Weinberg symphonies (June, page 38) I mentioned a Barshai recording of Symphony No 2 that does not exist – somehow my brain had derailed onto his recording of Sinfonietta No 2. Furthermore, the version on Alto is in fact no longer in the catalogue, though there are copies to be found on Amazon. All the more reason, then, to snap up the new DG issue.

OBITUARIES

A perfect partner for Lieder singers

JÖRG DEMUS

*Pianist and composer
Born December 2, 1928
Died April 16, 2019*



One of the major song- and chamber-pianists of our time has died at the age of 90. Born in Austria, Demus was one of the first pianists, along with Paul

Badura-Skoda (with whom he often performed as a duo), to explore performance on the fortepiano. As an accompanist he worked with some of the most significant Lieder singers of the post-war period, including Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Elly Ameling, Peter Schreier, Theo Adam and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (with whom he recorded extensively for DG). Of the Fischer-Dieskau/Demus *Winterreise* of 1966, Alan Blyth wrote: 'That this is the most interior, unadorned and undemonstrative of Fischer-Dieskau's readings perhaps arises from the fact that Demus, a discerning musician and sure accompanist, is the most reflective of all the singer's many partners in the cycle. Demus never strikes out on his own, is always there unobtrusively and subtly supportive,

with the right colour and phrasing, literally in hand.'

Demus studied at the Vienna Academy of Music from the age of 11, focusing on piano, composition and conducting. He made his debut as a pianist, aged 15, with Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* and graduated two years later in 1945 and then studied conducting with Hans Swarowsky and Josef Krips. From 1951 to '53 he worked with Yves Nat in Paris and then returned to Vienna where he studied with Wilhelm Kempff, Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli and Edwin Fischer, and took part in masterclasses with Walter Gieseking.

Though he did perform and record solo piano works too – his discography includes the complete solo piano works of Schumann (for Intercord) and Debussy (for Amadeo) – he focused on song and chamber-music.

As a chamber musician he worked frequently with Josef Suk and Antonio Janigro. As a composer, he focused on smaller-scale compositions and recorded a number of his works for cello and piano with Maria Kliegel (Marco Polo).

His catalogue includes recordings for Westminster, Remington, DG, HMV, RCA, Harmonia Mundi and Deutsche Harmonia Mundi.

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Benedetti plays jazz

A chance encounter between the violinist and Wynton Marsalis led to the jazz legend writing a concerto for her, premiered last year and now recorded. Charlotte Gardner meets them

Elgar: Symphony No 1

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























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

























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David Oakes

The actor on his musical upbringing, a passion for folk, and his composer role in TV's *Victoria*

There's something about being the son and brother of professional musicians ... My sister is an oboist, my mum's a horn player, and I think it was always expected that I'd be musical too – but there's too much practise involved! The true story is that I wanted to be a drummer, and I remember my mum saying that if I wanted to be a drummer, then I needed to be an orchestral percussionist, and would therefore need piano lessons. But after a few weeks of piano lessons I decided that actually I wanted to play the trumpet, and mum, being a brass player, said: 'Well I can teach you.' So I went from wanting to be a drummer to having trumpet lessons with my mum, which isn't fun because: 'Are you doing your scales?' 'No mum, I'm not.'

Later on I took up the clarinet. I got to Grade 5, at which point people younger than me were starting to get better than me, so I moved to the bass clarinet (at least in a department of one you're the best there). I also sang in the school choir. I remember one Christmas the BBC were doing *Songs of Praise* from Salisbury Cathedral, and they'd asked us trebles to process down the aisle singing, but because my voice had just broken I had to mime!

Being a clarinettist I was automatically drawn to Mozart and Brahms, but it was through my school choir and our tours to France – singing in Mont Saint-Michel and Notre-Dame – that I discovered Poulenc. We sang a wonderful piece called *Four Small Prayers of St Francis of Assisi*, and that was the first time I felt part of something that transcended just singing or playing – I found myself thinking, 'There's a reason I'm singing this and there's an emotional heart to it'.

Growing up with a sitting room always full of brass bands, your reaction is to find a music that's simpler – more mellow or kindly. For me, folk was that natural crossover between my musical upbringing and the narrative-based, story-telling future that I ended up pursuing. If you are interested in story-telling and the emotions within it, and you want to transport yourself to somewhere that isn't you, folk can do that really well. One of the things that I found fascinating in my journey with classical music is exploring where the two overlap: Percy Grainger, Bartók, and certainly Francis Child and the folk ballads that he collected.

There have been several points in my career where the acting and music have overlapped. For example, in my final year at Theatre School we mounted a co-production with the RSC of *Much Ado About Nothing*, and I orchestrated music for a small band and played clarinet, alto saxophone and bass clarinet (while also playing the parts of both Claudio and Verges).

I actually played a composer (Ernst II, Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha) in the TV series *Victoria*, so when filming I would endlessly mime Mendelssohn and Chopin (we called it



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'MendelChop') on a silent piano. There was one episode where I played a 'composition' to my on-screen love interest, Duchess Harriet of Sutherland (played by Margaret Clunie). We had planned to use some MendelChop for the scene, but, knowing my mum would recognise it, I went away and found the overture to an opera that Ernst had actually written, and asked our music coordinator Nigel Lilley to reduce it for piano. Although he actually composed it in later life, it's nice to think that the Duchess had inspired the melody, and that it would go on to form the basis of the overture – reverse history if you will. It's stuff like that that makes a job worth doing – even if nobody picks up on it, it means you're not just standing there saying the same old things in the same old ways.

I've also done poetry readings for concerts. Last year I read at the Southwell Music Festival, now run by Marcus Farnsworth, with whom I used to do similar events at University. I heard a beautiful piece by Thomas Adès called *The Fayrax Carol*. To me it was a bit like Britten, but more accessible. I think that's what this world needs – someone who pushes the barriers in one direction but sugar-coats it enough in the other so that you don't quite notice how you're being educated, or how you're being given something richer and more complex. **G**

David Oakes is playing the title role in Hamlet at Shakespeare's Rose Theatre in York from June 25 to August 31 – visit shakespearesrosetheatre.com for specific dates

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